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# **Understanding Child Prostitution in Malawi: A Participatory Approach**

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**Pearson Nkhoma**

**School of Applied Social Sciences**

**Thesis submitted to Durham University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**October 2016**



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**Signed:**

Pearson Nkhoma

**Date:**

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## **DEDICATION**

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you could see this journey through to completion.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite being a topic of concern globally, child prostitution is understood neither comprehensively nor critically. In particular, there have been few attempts to develop any depth of understanding of child prostitution in sub-Saharan Africa. Current understandings are largely based on adult perspectives while children and young people's own experiences of involvement have been marginalized. The study draws on theoretical approaches of children's rights, radical and liberal feminism, structure and agency, and the Capability Approach, to examine decisions made by children within particular economic, social and cultural structures. Using a participatory approach, 19 participants used a range of visual methods to create stories of their journeys into prostitution and their day-to-day lives within the institution of prostitution. In this way, they demonstrated their own understandings of their own involvement.

The study reveals the connections between: i) structural factors: patriarchal society, economic poverty, and cultural norms that govern marriage and limit access to education, ii) threats to livelihoods including HIV/AIDS, orphanhood, and climatic shocks that all contribute to constrain the life choices particularly of girls' and young women. While it is clear that all but one of the participants exercised agency in deciding to engage in prostitution as a means of survival, they showed how involvement in prostitution further constrained their freedom to live lives that they valued. Describing experiences they endured as 'being less than human', they extended understanding of child prostitution by drawing attention to the complex nature of the phenomenon.

The thesis ends by recommending a multi-dimensional policy approach to address child prostitution, making suggestions for further research including a deeper understanding of the demand side of prostitution, and recommends the use of the Capability Approach to illuminate questions of human development, human rights and social justice among other marginalized populations in developing countries.



## **CHAPTER ONE: CHILD PROSTITUTION: A TOPIC OF GLOBAL CONCERN**

*“My heart bleeds at the sight of a traumatized child. This exploitation cannot go on. For as long as I am President, the campaign against child sexual exploitation must be waged rigorously at all costs” - President of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001)*

### **1.1 Introduction**

The quote introducing this chapter captures the concerns of world leaders and the emotional responses to ‘child sexual exploitation’, also referred to as the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child prostitution. The diversity of terms used in the literature on children’s involvement in sexual activity with adults, with or without financial or other forms of exchange, reflects different discourses which in turn reflect diverse understandings of childhood in different cultural contexts and from different theoretical standpoints. A summary of these terms and common definitions is set out below (Table 1).

**Table 1: Definitions of Terms used in this thesis**

<b>Terminology</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Child	Anyone under the age of 18 as set out within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
Prostitution	Sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration, either monetary or not.
Child prostitution	Defined by <i>UNCRC's Optional Protocol</i> (2000) as “the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration”.
Sex work	Prostitution involving those who are over 18.
Sexual abuse	Any form of non-consensual sex.
Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE)	Non-consensual sex in exchange for some kind of remuneration.
Commercial sexual exploitation of Children (CSEC)	CSE involving children and young people below the age of 18. This term is often used as a general term to include child pornography, child prostitution, child trafficking and child sex tourism.
Youth	The period between 14 and 35 years.
Young People	Those falling within the youth age-group. This term overlaps with the UNCRC definition of a child as anyone under the age of 18.
Human trafficking	Any act or transaction whereby a person is recruited and transferred from one area to another for remuneration or any other consideration. If children are involved, it is called child trafficking.
Sex tourism	The practice where tourists visit an area to procure sex in exchange for remuneration.

(UNCRC, 1989; United Nations, 2000; Malawi Government, 2013; Melrose *et al.*, 2013; Sources: Human Rights Watch, 2014)

This introductory chapter explains the rationale behind the thesis and the core contribution to knowledge (see Section 7.3.1, p.253), arguing that despite being a topic of concern globally, current understandings of child prostitution are based largely on the observations and interpretations of adults and lack understanding of the lived experiences of children and young people who are, or have been, involved in prostitution. In section 1.2, I outline child prostitution as a topic of global concern and the children's rights discourse that dominates contemporary debates on child prostitution. Here, I argue that a deeper understanding requires attention to children and young people's own understandings of their involvement in prostitution. In Section 1.3, I problematize child prostitution, offering a brief critique of the children's rights perspective and its limitations, and arguing for the use of alternative perspectives to illuminate the phenomenon. I continue, in section 1.4, by introducing the research questions that underpin the thesis and explain my own position in terms of my values and motivation for undertaking this study in Malawi. Section 1.5 summarises this introductory chapter and sets out the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Child Prostitution: A Global Concern**

There is a growing concern about children and young people's involvement in prostitution across the globe (United Nations, 2000; UNICEF, 2001b; Andrews, 2004; Pinheiro, 2006; Department for Education (England), 2009; ECPAT International, 2009; Brown and Barrett, 2013; see for example Boer-Buquicchio, 2016). Defined as the practice of exchanging sex for some kind of remuneration (Narag & Maxwell 2009), prostitution is a highly contested and emotionally potent concept, taking different forms and subjected to different academic discourses (Edlund and Korn, 2002; Narag and Maxwell, 2009). However, child prostitution is most frequently framed in

official documents (World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 1996; UNICEF, 2001b; for example, see Department for Education (England), 2009) within a single discourse that underpins the practice as a form of child sexual abuse. Pearce (2000) has argued that despite differing constructions of prostitution as a legitimate form of work or requiring prohibition or criminalization, there is a common agreement that children and young people should be protected from sexual abuse, including prostitution.

The dominant discourse that frames contemporary discussions on child prostitution is based in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN 1989). In Article 1, the UNCRC starts by defining a child as anyone below the age of 18. It has been argued by different scholars such as O’Connell Davidson (2005a), Montgomery (2008, 2007, 2001a), and James and Prout (1997) that the UNCRC sets childhood as a stage of asexuality, immaturity and innocence. And the Convention sets out the right of all those under 18 years old to be protected against all forms of violence and exploitation in order to survive and lead a healthy life. I refer to this argument as the children’s rights perspective, or discourse, throughout this thesis.

From the children’s rights perspective, child prostitution is constituted as sexual abuse, an argument reflected in Article 2(b) of the *Optional Protocol* that defines prostitution as “the *use* of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration” (United Nations, 2000) (my emphasis). The argument that involvement in prostitution destroys children’s innocence and shatters their futures draws on the conceptualization of childhood by the UNCRC which frames children’s involvement in sexual activity as non-consensual (O’Connell Davidson, 2005a; Montgomery, 2007). In this sense, children are asexual, innocent and immature and, are

therefore, unable to consent to sex (O’Grady, 1992; ECPAT International, 1997, 2014; Barnardo’s, 1998; Estes and Weiner, 2001; Chase and Statham, 2005; Abdella, Hool and Tadesse, 2006; Hipolito, 2007; Joffres *et al.*, 2008; Rand, 2010; Cedeno, 2012; Bang *et al.*, 2014; Jimenez, Jackson and Deye, 2015; Ijadi-Maghsoodi *et al.*, 2016). Thus, children’s involvement in prostitution is referred to as an inherent form of sexual abuse only distinguishable on the basis of remuneration. This explains the logic behind the framing of child prostitution as a form of child sexual exploitation or, as Bang, Baker, Carpinteri *et al.* (2014, p. 3) articulate, “a form of commercialized child abuse”<sup>1</sup>.

Drawing attention to the perception of child prostitution as child sexual abuse, the term commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is widely used in argument based on the children’s rights approach. This emphasizes the forced nature of children and young people’s involvement in prostitution (International Labour Organisation (ILO) 1999; United Nations (UN) 2000; see Pinheiro, 2006). As documented by organizations working with children with experience of prostitution (ECPAT International (O’Grady, 1992; ECPAT International, 2009, 2014, 2015); Barnardo’s (Barnardo’s, 1998, 2009) UNICEF (2001a, 2001b) children and young people involved in prostitution are subjected to harmful experiences. Bang, Baker, Carpinteri, *et al.* (2014), Melrose (2004) and Hwang & Bedford (2003) report that involvement in prostitution renders children and young people vulnerable to be preyed upon, forced to abuse drugs, suffer systematic social disruption, be subjected to human trafficking with a range of physical and mental health implications. And children involved in prostitution are less likely to complete school (Barnardo’s, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Under Section 1.4.2 (p.14), I offer my position and motivation for researching this topic.

These discussions offer an image of children who are coerced, abducted, trafficked, sold or indentured into prostitution where they are controlled by pimps, manipulated, forced to abuse drugs, chained or enslaved in brothels, targeted by paedophiles – adults who are sexually attracted to pre-pubertal or under-aged children (Montgomery, 2001b, 2007; Rand, 2010). The implication is that children who engage in prostitution are forced into the practice against their will. This explains the definition of child prostitution offered by Chase and Statham (2005, p. 8) as: “the sexual exploitation of a child for remuneration in cash or in kind, usually but not always organised by an intermediary (parent, family member, procurer, teacher, etc.)”. In other words, no child freely decides to engage in prostitution. As Percy (2000) argues, a child would not choose to be sexually abused, something that involvement in prostitution entails due to children’s inability to consent to sex on the basis of their age as suggested by the UNCRC. The conceptualization of child prostitution as the commercial sexual exploitation of children rests on the argument that no child can choose to be sexually abused; a claim drawn on the understanding that those below the age of 18 – i.e. children, cannot consent to sex despite the legal age of consent varying considerably in different countries) (Montgomery, 2001a; Melrose, 2004; Melrose *et al.*, 2013).

Against this background, child prostitution is frequently reacted to with horror and disbelief. The then President of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for example described it as a “grave problem” and “social malaise” that requires urgent and serious attention (UNICEF, 2001b, p. 6). Referring to child prostitution in the Philippines, she touched on commonly cited arguments relating to how prostitution takes shape:

*“Many young Filipino children are **sexually assaulted** and in some instances **sold** like merchandise to **paedophiles**... Child victims are **initiated** into the sex trade between the ages of 10 and 18 years, some through the **influence** of peers, others through **deception** or **force**... The **effects** of sexual exploitation on children can be **irreparable**. Their **traumatic experiences** give them a **distorted** sense of **values** and a negative outlook towards people and life in general. They may have low self-esteem, feel inadequate and mistrust others. Their families and communities may ostracize them. These children are also highly vulnerable to substance abuse, physical violence, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and early pregnancy” (UNICEF, 2001b).*

And the themes outlined in this quote are reflected in public discussion and scholarship in the area of child prostitution.

With reports of increasing numbers of children being forced into commercial sex or trafficked for prostitution or sex tourism, child prostitution emerged as a serious concern on the international agenda in the early 1990s. Delegates from 122 countries and a number of national and international NGOs that work with children from different parts of the world convened in Stockholm for the First World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) where the Declaration and Agenda for Action against CSEC (1996) was adopted:

“The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of children’s rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of

coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery”.

While demanding high priority for action against child prostitution, delegates reaffirmed the need for coordinated efforts between countries, to ensure that “every child is entitled to full protection from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” (1996).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) characterises child prostitution as “one of the gravest infringement of rights that children can endure” (Willis and Levy, 2002, p. 1418); while the ILO’s (1999) Convention 182 categorizes child prostitution as being among the ‘worst forms of child labour’. In the same vein, Article 34 of the UNCRC and Article 27 of the ACRWC<sup>2</sup> (Organisation of African Unity, 1990) respectively assert the need to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse including inducement, coercion or encouragement of children to engage in any sexual activity such as prostitution. The commercial sexual exploitation of children has also been described in the literature as a “global epidemic” and a social epidemic stealing “the innocence of children” (Ferranti, 2007, p. 3). And Ennew (2008) cites ILO Convention 82 (ILO, 1999) as evidence that child prostitution is universally condemned as being among the worst forms of child labour.

O’Grady, founder of ECPAT International, an organization that helped bring child prostitution to the world’s attention, referred to the practice as “a crime against humanity” (O’Grady, 1992, p. 7), arguing that “The prostitution of children is running rampant [as] tens of thousands of young children are being kept as sexual slaves to satisfy adult passions” and described children

---

<sup>2</sup> *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*



involved in prostitution as abducted, trafficked, sold, controlled and overall, forced, into prostitution; a practice that results in the “untold suffering” and/or premature death of children (1992, p. 7). Further evidence and argument (Willis and Levy, 2002; Andrews, 2004; Rafferty, 2007, 2008; Barnardo’s, 2009; Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2010; Posner, Kendall and Funk, 2011) stress the negative consequences of involvement in prostitution for children including threats to their rights to education and health, exposure to life-threatening situations, violence, diseases, and physical, emotional and other forms of abuse.

Many authors (Barrett, 1997a; Estes and Weiner, 2001; Belser, de Cock and Mehran, 2005; Abdella, Hool and Tadesse, 2006; Pinheiro, 2006; Hipolito, 2007; Ennew, 2008; Joffres *et al.*, 2008; Lukman, 2009a; Brown and Barrett, 2013) have cited the UNCRC (1989) and its Second Optional Protocol (United Nations, 2000), as well as Convention 182 (1999) that supports action to eliminate child ‘exploitation’ as evidence that child prostitution is [becoming] a problem of concern globally. Yet, evidence from the past decade shows that child prostitution is evident in all corners of the world (Pearce, 2000; Estes and Weiner, 2001; UNICEF, 2001b; Svedin and Priebe, 2007; Ennew, 2008; Barnardo’s, 2009; Williams, Binagwaho and Betancourt, 2012; Brown and Barrett, 2013; ECPAT International, 2014; Peled and Lugasi, 2015). It is estimated that over one million children are involved in prostitution which is also characterized by sexual harassment; (gang) rape; enslavement, and forced misuse of drugs, with limited, if any, welfare support and intervention (Willis and Levy, 2002; Bokhari, 2008; Ennew, 2008; Barnardo’s, 2009; Rand, 2010; Bang *et al.*, 2014). The UN’s Special Rapporteur on CSEC, Ms Maud de Boer-Buquicchio (2016) is of the view that this is due to weak political will in implementing the commitments of world leaders and policy-makers. But as I will argue in the next section, one of

the gaps currently posing a barrier to efforts in addressing child prostitution also relates to the way child prostitution is discussed within the children's rights discourse.

### **1.3 Problematizing Child Prostitution**

Child prostitution has been characterised in the literature as intolerable, dreadful to bear or countenance since the first world congress on CSEC, with claims to the contrary being met with contempt and equated to tolerance of child molesters or paedophiles (Montgomery, 2001b; Ennew, 2008; Dodsworth, 2015). But as I was researching this topic for my MA dissertation, I found this dominant overview to be problematic since it appears to stifle debate and prevent attempts to develop a critical understanding of child prostitution. As Montgomery (Montgomery, 2001b, 2007) and O'Connell Davidson (2005a) note, the children's rights framework, rather than building argument on firm foundations of empirical evidence, maintains awareness of child prostitution as the result of coercion or physical force; with children being targeted and trafficked to be raped by paedophiles for remuneration. This makes it difficult to generate a comprehensive and valid understanding of child prostitution founded on the lived experiences of those who have been involved in the practice. In turn, this affects the potential to develop effective interventions to support children and young people engaged, or at risk of engagement, in prostitution.

Current understanding of child prostitution derives from claims by the media and organizations (O'Grady, 1992; Barnardo's, 1998, 2009, UNICEF, 2001a, 2001b; Pinheiro, 2006; such as ECPAT International, 2014). While these organizations have clearly documented the inherent physical, psychological and health implications associated with children's involvement in prostitution. Montgomery (2001a, 2001b) and O'Connell Davidson (2005a) have argued that

facts are easily substituted by sensationalism to arouse public outrage or set a particular agenda for action. For example, the poor quality of data resulting from secrecy surrounding prostitution (Chase and Statham, 2004; Rand, 2010), leads to general estimates of one million children being involved in prostitution globally and 250,000 at risk of involvement in the USA (Bang *et al.*, 2014). However, care is required in interpreting these estimates which have been used since 1992 when O’Grady (1992) published *The Child and The Tourist: The Story Behind the Escalation of Child Prostitution in Asia (Rape of the Innocent)*.

A further critique of common representations of child prostitution relates to the tendency to overlook the cultural contexts of childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Montgomery, 2009a). A majority of the studies have been undertaken in the global north and/or in Eastern Asia by Western researchers or organisations whose views on childhood are based on Western cultural contexts (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Pearce, 2000; Estes and Weiner, 2001; Montgomery, 2001b; S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Lukman, 2006; Sanders, 2006; Joffres *et al.*, 2008; Rafferty, 2008; Williams, Binagwaho and Betancourt, 2012; Brown and Barrett, 2013; ECPAT International, 2014). Melrose (2004, p. 24) argues: “sex markets are dynamic and constantly changing. What may explain a young person’s involvement in one time and place, will not necessarily explain the involvement of a different young person in another time and place (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Hwang and Bedford, 2004). As these markets develop, expand, and become more sophisticated, so too must our understandings of them if appropriate interventions are to be devised.

To this end, questions about how and why children and young people become involved in prostitution are important as it is clear that claims relating to child prostitution are of questionable validity and reliability. With argument based on the notion of childhood represented in the UNCRC, debate has failed to engage directly with children and young people to include their own experiences of engagement in prostitution (Montgomery, 2001, 2001; O’Connell Davidson, 2005a). Ignoring children’s agency in this way, and perpetuating perceptions of ‘childhood as innocence’ (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Montgomery, 2001, 2008b; O’Connell Davidson, 2005a; Ennew, 2008), has led Phoenix (2001) to argue that attention is diverted from the social, economic, political and ideological conditions which shape children and young people’s day-to-day lives as well as their involvement in prostitution.

In this thesis, I address this gap in understanding by turning attention to the conditions that shape children and young people’s involvement in prostitution in Malawi the country of which I am a citizen, where I grew up, went to school and completed undergraduate studies. I engage with young women involved in prostitution to talk about their involvement and experiences of prostitution since childhood. The significance of this approach, **a highlight of both the empirical and methodological contribution I make to knowledge through this thesis (see Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2)**, is that it does not sensationalise one stage. Rather, it centers on participants’ own lived experiences of involvement through a participatory approach that emphasizes open dialogue without driving the participants to offer scripted accounts. In the following section I outline the fundamental objectives and questions of the research that guide the empirical research that underpins this thesis. And I explain my own position in relation to the research.

## **1.4 Research Objectives, Research Questions and Researcher Positionality**

### **1.4.1 Research Objectives and Questions**

The objective of this study is to develop a critical understanding of child prostitution in Malawi where the phenomenon has gained prominence as a matter of public concern in the media for over a decade, and has been clearly articulated as a challenge for policy-makers and charity organizations working with children and young people (Malawi Government, 2010; UNICEF Malawi, 2009). Yet, despite the high profile of the topic, debates on child prostitution have overlooked children and young people's own perspectives about their involvement in, and experiences of, prostitution. Against this background, the objective in this study is to develop a nuanced understanding of child prostitution by drawing on children and young people's own understandings of their involvement in prostitution.

In Malawi, efforts to safeguard children against various forms of exploitation are currently gaining prominence as seen with the passing of the *Child Care, Protection and Justice Act* (Malawi Government, 2010) and the *Marriage Act* (Malawi Government, 2015b). Both Acts have provisions that focus on child sexual abuse, including child prostitution. These Acts represent an effort to implement the UNCRC, ratified by Malawi in 1991. They introduce specific measures to protect children, yet the attention given to child prostitution (or commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people) remains thin.

By focusing on Malawi, my objective is to make sense of children and young people's own accounts and experiences of prostitution. I do this not only within the context of current evidence and argument, which is produced predominantly by researchers from the global north, but also by paying specific attention to the particular cultural and socio-economic contexts that are shaped by, and reflect, the inherent tensions of international and national politics in the wider arena of global 'development' (Banik and Chinsinga, 2016). The following research questions have guided me in achieving this objective:

RQ1 How and why do children and young people in Malawi engage in prostitution?

RQ2 How do children and young people understand their involvement in prostitution?

RQ3. How do social, economic, political and cultural issues influence and shape (children and young people's) involvement including the routes into, continued involvement in and/or routes out of prostitution?

#### **1.4.2 Researcher Positionality**

As a young Malawian man, my own commitment to children's welfare and social justice has grown from my own experience of growing up in a rural community affected by poverty, limited life expectancy and family support systems disrupted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. With the strongest motivation to complete school and enter higher education I completed an undergraduate degree in the humanities – Media for Development - in 2009. The Malawian system of higher education does not always allow applicants to study the degree of their choice, and this was my own experience. However, studying Media for Development developed my awareness of, and interest in, the impact of politics on the day-to-day lives of people removed

from government and confirmed my thinking about the importance of activism. It also gave me the skills to engage in the use of social media, producing blogs on matters of social justice. With experience of graduate teaching at University I sought to broaden and strengthen my knowledge and experience and made a successful application to become a Ruth First Scholar at Durham University<sup>3</sup> successfully completing a Masters degree in Social Work Studies. My motivation to undertake this particular study on child prostitution in Malawi has been strongly influenced by the realization that the majority of studies on the topic in sub-Saharan Africa have been undertaken in, or by researchers from, the global north influenced by particular understandings of childhood. I have also been motivated by the absence of children and young people's own accounts of their own experiences of involvement in prostitution and a commitment to making a reality of children and young people's active participation in research that has, in the past, largely focused 'on' them. As the oldest son in a family where both my parents formed second families, following the death of my father I have benefitted from the generosity of relatives at times when traditional expectations would have placed heavy responsibilities on me. With their understanding and support I have been able to continue my education. This has not been the case for all my younger siblings and, reflecting on the deep injustices associated with gender, I developed a deeper awareness of the implications of early school 'drop-out' and early marriage for girls. Awareness of media reports about children's involvement in prostitution and a period working with the children's rights-based NGO Save the Children heightened my interest in the national political climate promoting children's rights, the importance of girls' education and attempts to address early marriage and child birth. But having had my eyes opened to the phenomenon of child prostitution while working with Save the Children, I set out to understand

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://community.dur.ac.uk/ruthfirst.trust/>

the experiences of what I perceived to be a particularly disadvantaged group of children and young people. Although my intention was not to focus exclusively on the experiences of girls and young women, as I explain later in the thesis, working with gatekeepers to access a sample of children, or young people who experienced prostitution in their childhood resulted in a study involving girls and young women. My aim has been to understand their experiences from their own perspectives, in order to develop a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of child prostitution in Malawi that can inform the design of programmes to ‘support’ children and young people who find themselves involved or at risk of involvement. A further practical aim is to help raise awareness within Malawi about lived experiences of children and young people involved in prostitution, a question that receives only superficial attention in the *Child Protection Act* despite Malawi being one of the 122 countries that committed to act on CSEC during the 1996 Stockholm Congress against CSEC.

### **1.5 Summary and Thesis Outline**

Despite being a topic of concern globally, child prostitution is not comprehensively and critically understood. A significant gap in understanding is the absence of children and young people’s own experiences and understandings of their involvement. Global debate on children’s involvement in prostitution has been grounded in the children’s rights discourse linked to the UNCRC which frames children as innocent and insufficiently mature to consent to sex, leading to the image of children’s involvement in prostitution as equating to sexual abuse. My starting point for this study is that such an approach effectively limits attempts to support children and young people who do become involved in prostitution since current understandings are not grounded in children and young people’s own perspectives and experiences.



In the following chapter, I offer a general overview of Malawi in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the cultural, socioeconomic and political context of the study. In Chapter Three, I review existing evidence and argument on childhood and childhood prostitution within three different discourses: i) children's rights, ii) feminist perspectives, and iii) agency and structure debates. I also consider the relevance of the Capability Approach which is used to locate the implications of child prostitution within a development debate focusing particularly on Nussbaum's extension to Sen's Capability Approach that focuses on questions of gender and development (Sen, 1995, 2001, Nussbaum, 2001b, 2005, 2013). In Chapter Four, I provide a detailed account of the methodological underpinnings of the study, research design and process including complex ethical considerations, questions of access and sampling, methods of data collection and analysis and end by offering a critically reflective discussion of the challenges encountered in the course of the study. The findings, presented in Chapter Five and discussed in Chapter Six, show how and why research participants engage in prostitution and these are followed chapter six by a critical analysis of participants' experiences to develop a nuanced understanding of child prostitution.

In the final chapter, I summarise the thesis; outline the original contribution to scholarly knowledge in regards to understanding of child prostitution; and make recommendations for research, policy and practical action.

## **CHAPTER TWO: STUDY CONTEXT - MALAWI**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is designed to provide an understanding of the context in which the empirical study of this thesis has been conducted. I provide an outline of the circumstances shaping Malawi in the twenty-first century and outline key challenges informing the focus of this study, children's involvement in prostitution.

### **2.2 Malawi – Overview of a Developing Country**

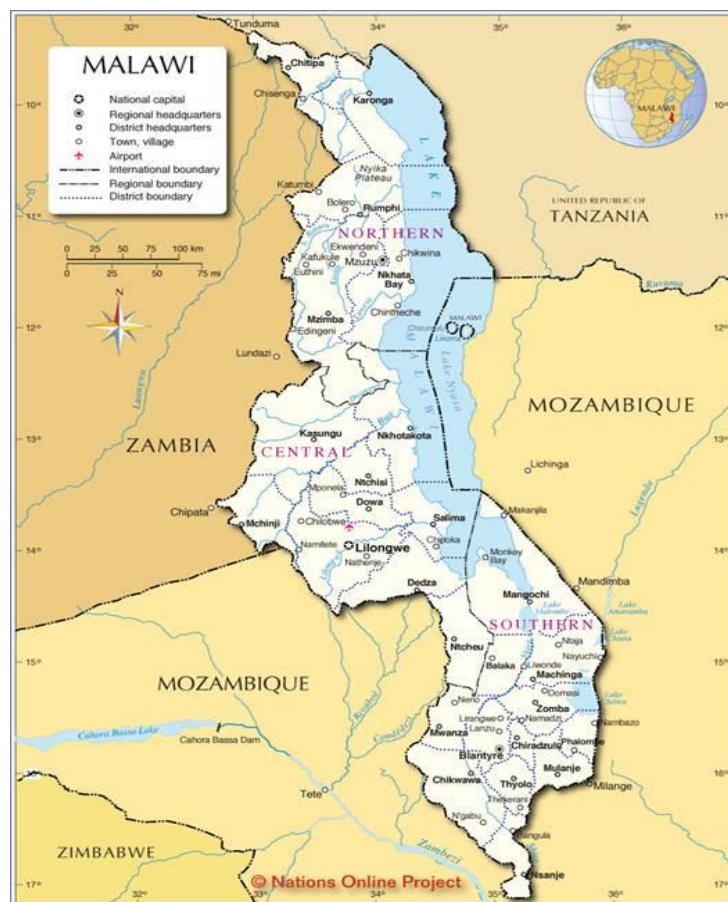


Figure 1: Map of Malawi  
(Human Rights Watch, 2014)

As shown in Figure 1 (p. 18), Malawi, popularly known as ‘The Warm Heart of Africa’, is a landlocked country in Southern Africa bordered by Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Mozambique. Following almost a century of British colonial rule as Nyasaland, Malawi gained independence in 1964 and became a republic in 1966. Its first president, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, led a neocolonial style dictatorship involving violent suppression and imprisonment of opponents. Ruling for almost thirty years, the increasing influence of internal opposition led to a referendum and the adoption of multiparty democracy in 1994. But despite optimism that multi-party democracy could serve as a more reliable foundation for development, a number of factors have contributed to Malawi’s continuing position among the least developed countries in the world (Kasfir, 2013), ranked 173 of 188 countries in the 2015 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2015). Despite Lake Malawi being a rich source of fish which, together with cash crops, and tourism centred around Lake Malawi, constitute the majority of Malawi’s earnings, the country remains vulnerable to wider global economic forces and climate related shocks including drought and floods that threaten agricultural production, including subsistence farming that involves 80 percent of the population.

Malawi has four major urban centres: Blantyre, the country’s commercial hub, and Zomba are situated in the Southern Region, Lilongwe, the country’s capital city and administrative centre, in the Central Region, and Mzuzu in the Northern region. World Bank population figures indicate a ‘moderate’ rate of urbanization in Malawi (World Bank 2016) with an increase in urban population from 4 percent in 1960 to 16 percent in 2015 as increasing numbers from rural areas seek opportunities for employment or other forms of income generation to sustain themselves and their families arrive in cities. The most recently available measures of poverty reflect a more

nuanced picture than simple measures of household income, including a wider range of indicators including access to health services and education (UNDP, 2013). While almost three-quarters of the population live below the poverty line of \$US1.25 per day, two-thirds experience multi-dimensional poverty (UNDP, 2015b).

With a high fertility rate and a population approaching 18 million, Malawi is a very ‘young’ country with almost half its population aged under 15. It has an extremely high dependency ratio of over 90 percent, with each working person, on average, supporting another individual. A 2015-16 survey (MDHS, 2016) records adolescent (15-19) fertility rates at 136 per thousand, a factor associated with early marriage, higher risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes and early school drop-out. Over 10 percent of the adult (15-49) population is estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS and despite positive reductions in the prevalence of tuberculosis and incidence of malaria, these diseases, together with other health conditions including diabetes and hypertension, contribute to high rates of child, maternal and adult mortality (WHO, 2014).

A predominantly Christian country with a minority Muslim population, Malawi has eleven major tribes with the Chewa constituting the largest ethnic group representing over one-third of the total population (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2016). While each tribe has its own language, Chichewa and English are the official national languages. Each tribe is governed by a traditional leader in accordance with the *1967 Chiefs Act* (Malawi Government, 1967) which stipulates the functions and roles of these leaders. They are seen as the custodians of culture in accordance with customary law and exercise authority over the population in their jurisdiction. Appointed by the President, chiefs occupy an ambiguous position, being expected to

conform to the line of the party in power, and have commonly been used by central government as a vehicle to garner support among the population (Chinkonda, 2012; Kayuni, 2015). However, as Chiweza (2007) explains, contrary to predictions that the position of traditional chiefs would be weakened by the introduction of democracy, they continue to exercise considerable power through the persistence of traditional authority (Cammack, Kanyongolo and O'Neil, 2009; Eggen, 2011). And, despite the introduction of a range of policy reforms, multiparty democracy has not brought the expected gains in terms of development as the practice of democracy continues to be strongly influenced by the interests of elites and delivery of services by what O'Neil *et al* (2014) refer to as 'fragmented governance'.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I explore in more detail the continuing significance of cultural beliefs and traditions in limiting the effectiveness of policies designed to promote development and articulate their relevance for understanding the phenomenon of child prostitution. And, I go on to examine the persistent influence of cultural beliefs and traditions on the implementation of policies that may be expected to reduce the numbers of children and young people engaged in prostitution.

### **2.3 Cultural Context**

Being a predominately patriarchal society (Tiessen, 2008; Gunde, 2015), cultural beliefs and norms in Malawi continue to play a powerful role in influencing family practices that have been shown to be linked to child prostitution in a number of societies. Early marriage and child pregnancy have been identified as catalysts for children's involvement in prostitution as a result of the increased responsibilities placed on young mothers. Evidence from India (Blanchard *et al.*,

2005; Orchard, 2007; Chemin and Mbiekop, 2015), Rwanda (Williams, Binagwaho and Betancourt, 2012), Taiwan (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003), Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam (International Organization for Migration, 1999; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Montgomery, 2008b) has shown that some children and young people, among others, engage in prostitution in order to support their siblings, parents or their own children. While cultural norms lead some girls and young women into prostitution, there are others who make an active decision in accepting or choosing marriage as the means to supporting their families as well as fitting the normative role of womanhood. In this study, I explore in more detail why and how children and young women had ‘chosen’ prostitution.

### **2.3.1 Impact on Education**

While years of expected schooling have risen to 10.8 following significant policy reforms, to encourage education, the average number of school years completed remains very low at 4.3, reflecting ongoing challenges in shifting beliefs about the value of education, particularly for girls in societies such as Malawi that is strongly patriarchal. In Malawi, early marriage and child-bearing are associated with incomplete school education in contexts where marriage is commonly accorded a higher priority than education for girls (Samati, 2013; Omoeva, Hatch and Sylla, 2014). However, Mensch et al (2014) urge caution in reaching firm conclusions about the strength of association between these factors since available data have typically relied on individuals’ recall of events. Further research funded by the ESRC is currently being conducted by Judith Glynn and the Ministry of Education in Malawi to develop a more nuanced understanding of the causes of school drop-out.

Many groups, particularly in the Central and Southern regions, view puberty as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood and marriage. For girls, initiation into adulthood includes instructions on womanhood and values to prepare them for sexual life and marriage (Munthali and Zulu, 2007). These ceremonies also serve to mark girls' availability for marriage. In this way, the position of women as housewives, and men as having greater economic power, is further reinforced.

While evidence from the annual demographic health surveys in Malawi does not support a direct correlation between initiation practices/ceremonies and age of first marriage, it does support argument that the continued importance placed on ceremonies marking rites of passage into adolescence exposes girls to the risk of early and unprepared pregnancies inside or outside marriage. The persistence of cultural practices that continue to celebrate girls' entry into a period of sexual maturity and mark their availability for marriage creates something of a paradox. While pregnancy outside marriage continues to be associated with shame, and while early marriage also carries a higher risk of domestic violence (UNICEF, 2011) separation and divorce, young mothers may find themselves assuming adult responsibilities without the support of the father of their child/ren or, most importantly in a context of poverty, the support of their own families. Seeking an independent means of survival without the benefits of completed schooling limits young women's employment prospects to casual low income jobs such as undertaking laundry or becoming a housemaid, jobs that are more readily found in urban areas. This often implies further distancing from existing familial and friendship support networks.

In the interests of wider development and poverty reduction, and with support from Western democracies, Bakili Muluzi, the country's first democratically elected president who was in power from 1994 to 2004, introduced free primary education. This led to a dramatic increase in enrolment (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003; Chimombo, 2009). However, with an absence of free secondary and tertiary education gains in primary enrolment have not been mirrored in secondary education and beyond.

In the 1990s, during Muluzi's period in power, the USA funded the Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) programme. Kadzamira and Rose (2003, p. 505) note that prior to the introduction of GABLE which introduced a fee-waiver: "girls' education was not a priority of the government and gender disparities were not targeted in education policies and plans". This, they argue, made it difficult for the initiative to be fully embraced by government. And, as with free primary education, GABLE overlooked structural specificities which led to opposition from some sections of society, and many parents needed little persuasion to maintain the status quo that prioritized boys' over girls' education (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). With widespread household poverty and dominant cultural norms that perceive girls as future housewives, the fee-waiver has failed to prevent many, particularly girls, from leaving school before they complete primary education. So, despite the advent of political democracy and government policies to support educational opportunities for girls, the authority of traditional leaders has led to a lack of determination on the part of both ruling and opposition parties not wishing to be perceived as disrupting cultural practices in a way that may put them in contradiction with communities or their chiefs (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003; Chimombo, 2009; Grant, 2012).



Gender disparities in education remain strongly evident in Malawi. A 2012 survey showed that although only 15 percent of women had never attended school, only nine percent of girls completed primary school, only six percent completed secondary school and 1.8 percent attained education beyond secondary school (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2012). Women's educational attainment lags behind that of men at all levels and these disparities are accentuated in rural areas where numbers of dependents per household are higher and poverty is more widespread.

### **2.3.2 Impact on Health**

Malawi's food insecurity, the result of vulnerability to world markets and climatic shocks, is further aggravated by high rates of HIV infections (NSO 2012). With a prevalence rate of about 12 percent (Malawi Government, Ministry of Finance, 2015), Malawi is ranked among 10 countries that have an infection rate of over 10 percent (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2012; UNAIDS, 2014; Avert, 2016). This implies that close to 1.5 million people in Malawi are living with HIV. Comprehensive efforts to address the epidemic have achieved universal awareness and new infections have been reduced by almost by a third from 98,000 in the past decade (Avert, 2016). Evidence from the National Statistical Office (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2012, 2016) reveals that, at 14.5 percent, the Southern region has a higher prevalence than the other two regions. Likewise, urban centres have a considerably higher infection rate than rural areas with 17 percent prevalence in urban areas compared to nine percent in rural areas.

HIV and AIDS has a double layer of importance in understanding child prostitution. First is the higher likelihood of HIV infection among those working in prostitution who face stigmatization on both counts. Second is the role of the disease in increasing adult mortality rates, creating the phenomenon of ‘AIDS orphans’, children left with severely reduced, or no, family support. The majority of all new HIV infections occur through unprotected heterosexual sex; and among those who have multiple sex partners, factors that have generated fear, anxiety, and prejudice against those infected with HIV. ‘Traditional’ belief systems associate the infection with punishment from God for promiscuity, immorality and wickedness (Kopelman, 2002; Sano *et al.*, 2016). These beliefs and the associated stigma have created barriers for people with HIV in seeking diagnosis and treatment. The most severely affected are sex workers and gay men, groups for whom prejudice, discrimination and stigma are exacerbated by the fact that prostitution and homosexuality are both illegal in Malawi, making it risky for them to access information or identify support and services (Avert, 2016). It is against this background, that the prevalence rate has remained the highest among these groups, with infection estimates for sex workers suggested to be over 60 percent while the national infection rate has been showing signs of decline (Malawi Government, 2015a). Despite the continuing high levels of infection among those involved in prostitution there has been a reduction from 77 percent in the infection rate at the beginning of the decade, the result of recent efforts to acknowledge that those involved in prostitution are among higher risk groups that require attention (Malawi Government, 2015a). This acknowledgement has not, however, led to any significant attempts to develop a more critical understanding of the lives of those involved in prostitution.

## **2.4 Parental Death and ‘AIDS Orphans’**

Turning to the question of children left unsupported as a result of parental deaths, the most recent demographic health survey (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2016), shows HIV continuing as one of the major causes of death in Malawi. Despite the prevalence rate having been reduced because of increased awareness and HIV prevention and behavioral change initiatives, the National Aids Commission (2005) estimates suggest there are likely to be 1.1 million ‘AIDS orphans’ by 2020 (Conroy *et al.*, 2016). Despite biomedical advances, the necessary scale of change in human behaviour in terms of sexual practices, willingness to acknowledge infection and medication compliance has not been achieved and efforts to influence infection reducing behaviours continue to meet with strong resistance. As Coates, Richter and Caceres (2008) have argued: behavioural science has not kept up with biomedical interventions.

HIV/AIDS have had a devastating impact on Malawi at both household and national level. To quote from the NAC report (2005, pp. 1–2):

Deaths of the most economically productive individuals constitute personal, economic and social tragedies in the lives of surviving family, friends and employers. One needs to appreciate the unprecedented increase in the number of Malawian children under 15 who have been living without one or both parents to understand the impact of the sharp rises in the rates of adult mortality due to the AIDS epidemic [which] has led to increased destitution. In addition, [HIV/AIDS related] deaths of the most productive individuals have eroded Malawi’s capacity to attain self sufficiency in human resource development and have significantly contributed to the low productivity in all sectors of the economy.

It is for this reason that HIV/AIDS is identified as one of Malawi’s major social and economic development problems. Studies also show that more than half of the new infections occur among

those in the productive age group of 15-49 years, with HIV related illnesses and death resulting in fewer adults working. The NAC argues this directly affects people who are reliant on the person with HIV or suffering of AIDS (Malawi Government, NAC, 2014).

## **2.5 Efforts to End Child Marriage**

Campaigns to end child marriage, that pose such significant risks to the health and continued well-being of adolescent and young women and their children, has led to the passing of *The Marriage Divorce and Family Relations Bill*, in 2015 (Malawi Government, 2015b) that criminalised child marriage and underlined the country's commitment to the UNCRC. The bill was strongly supported by Joyce Banda, Malawi's first woman president between 2012 and 2014, who, as former Minister of Gender, had introduced the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill in 2006, providing a legal framework to address violence against women and girls. Despite the optimism among human rights' and women's groups associated with the growing representation of women in high political office, Joyce Banda was defeated in the 2014 general election and progress in ending violence towards women and girls, including child marriages, remains slow. This is thought to be associated, in large part, to the strength of cultural values and traditions that continue to confer second class status on women and girls. Critical reading of the 2015 Marriage Act, designed to ban marriages under the age of 18 in line with the UNCRC definition of childhood reveals continuing acknowledgment of customary marriage, outlined in the Constitution that permits marriage from the age of 15 with parental consent. An unintended consequence of child marriage is the creation of women-headed households as young wives unprepared to tolerate violence leave the marital home (Jensen and Thornton, 2003).

In Malawi, a quarter of households are headed by females, nearly a third of whom have no formal educational background. And women-headed households have been shown to have more dependents (54 percent) than male headed households (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2012). Education for girls in general is not accorded the same priority as for boys who are perceived as household breadwinners, expected to take care of their wives and children; their younger siblings and parents who survive into old age. Yet, despite similar roles being associated with women in women-headed households, girls continue to be given lower priority by families in terms of access to education. With lower educational attainment and in the absence of a male breadwinner, young women in these circumstances may find themselves choosing between casual employment that may not render sufficient income to sustain the family, and prostitution (Verheijen, 2013; Dodsworth, 2015).

## **2.6 Power Relations**

### **2.6.1 Unequal Gender Power Relations**

Malawi's cultural context, in terms of its impact on education (p. 22) and early marriages (see p.28), particularly for girls, reflects power dynamics in Malawi. On one hand, the notion of power relates to gender relations. Being a strongly patriarchal society, this has been well established by empirical studies (Davidson, 1993; Kerr, 2006; MacPherson *et al.*, 2012) with regards to gendered unequal power dynamics. As these studies document, across most social groups in Malawi, the male possesses power over the female in different aspects of socioeconomic activities. In a study conducted in Northern Malawi, Kerr (2006) notes that due to this inequality in power relations, in which women have little decision making power or entitlements, indicative of power within a household, the risk of abuse for them is higher with

very limited material and social kin-support. The unequal gendered-power relations leave women in a more vulnerable position than men who have a strong degree of control over the ways in which women can exercise agency. A study by Kathewera-Banda *et al.* (2005, p. 649) found that “Malawian women are situated in a social, legal, and political-economic environment that sustains unequal gender power relations that tolerate the perpetuation of violence against women and leave them more vulnerable to HIV infection and infringement of their sexual and reproductive health rights”. Women have reported having less control over their lives including sexual relations, bearing children and whether to have sex or not (Lindgren, Rankin and Rankin, 2005) with Malawi’s *Marriage Act* only conceptualizing marital rape to cases where the process for divorce has started and the man and woman are no longer living together. With women having less entitlement and being considered as ‘less important’, the boy child is given significant attention compared to the girl child, an aspect that is evident in relation to education as discussed in Section 2.3.1.

### **2.6.2 Unequal Adult/Child Power Dynamics**

The notion of power dynamics (shaped largely by the cultural positioning of adults and children) is also evident in adults’ exercise of power over children. At household level parents, especially fathers, are considered to have a supreme entitlement and control over the child. The notion of unequal power dynamics between adults and children is evident in the common saying *makolo ndiMulungu wapansi pano* which literally translates to *parents are the God on earth* or *mai ako ndi mulungu wachiwiri* (your mother is the second God). The parental figure often refers to any adult who the child is expected to respect. Being a predominantly religious society (Malawi Government, National Statistical Office, 2012), these notions where parents/adults are equated to

God implies that children cannot question their authority, just as people are expected to obey religious doctrines and consider God as supreme being. In such circumstances, space is created for practices such as arranged and/or child marriages, abusive and violent practices against children as long as these please the adults, a phenomenon evidenced in a nationwide survey on violence against children carried out by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare *et al.* (2014). This unequal adult/child power dynamic limits the manner in which children can exercise agency.

Unequal power relations between men and women, and between adults and children, create, reinforce and reproduce practices that subject those with less power (children, girls and women) to exploitation, limited entitlements, and limited exercise of agency in line with socially constructed norms. Nonetheless, children, girls and women are not simply passive victims of unequal power dynamics. What is evident from a number of studies conducted in Malawi (Kathewera-Banda *et al.*, 2005; Lindgren, Rankin and Rankin, 2005; Kerr, 2006; MacPherson *et al.*, 2012), for example, is that women devise ways to by-pass their unequal position of power. But these studies also show that their efforts are further disadvantaged by structural factors that reinforce the unequal power dynamics, exacerbating the vulnerability of those with limited power over their own lives and livelihoods.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the Malawian context in which the empirical study of childhood prostitution in this thesis is conducted. Socio-cultural norms relating to gender, age and family systems intersect to contribute to the tensions arising from wider national and

international political and economic forces that see Malawi taking steps to address questions of children's and women's rights in a context of extreme poverty and male hegemony, circumstances that leave girls and young women vulnerable to coercion or to contemplate engaging in prostitution.

In the following chapter I review the literature to identify existing evidence and argument about the phenomenon of child prostitution, different theoretical approaches to child prostitution and gaps in knowledge that inform the research questions guiding the empirical study of the thesis.



## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD PROSTITUTION**

### **3.1 Introduction**

I argued in Chapter One that current understandings of child prostitution are not comprehensive. I explained that this is mainly because current discussions tend to ignore: i) children and young people's own accounts of their involvement in this activity; ii) wider contextual issues such as those described in Chapter Two where I outline the circumstances that shape people's day-to-day lives in Malawi and explain their relevance for the subject covered by this thesis.

In this chapter, I review existing evidence and arguments on childhood and childhood prostitution within three different discourses. I examine the children's rights framework and further my argument that this can only generate limited knowledge and understanding of child prostitution. The second section discusses feminist perspectives which conceptualise prostitution as either sexual exploitation or sex work, linked to patriarchal views of women. In the third section I outline the structure-agency debate which focuses both on structural constraints and individual agency to overcome those constraints and the relative influence of structure and agency in understanding the phenomenon of prostitution. Following examination of these three discourses, in the final section I consider the relevance of the Capability Approach (Sen 2001, 1999; Nussbaum 2005, 2001) as a framework for examining and making sense of child prostitution.

### **3.2 The Children's Rights Framework**

The children's rights framework has dominated thinking on child prostitution for the past two decades. It is also commonly referred to as the child protection or child sexual exploitation framework. As I will show throughout this section, this is mainly because it identifies anyone below the age of 18 who is involved in prostitution as a victim of sexual abuse according to their age (Pearce, 2006; Ennew, 2008; Brown and Barrett, 2013). This framework has largely guided policy responses to child prostitution.

### **3.2.1 The Construction of Child Prostitution as Sexual Abuse**

This construction is rooted in the UNCRC (1989) which defines a child as anyone below the age of 18. As Montgomery (Montgomery, 2007, 2008b) and O'Connell Davidson (2005) respectively point out, the convention asserts that those falling within this age group cannot consent to sex. This is on the understanding that childhood is a period of asexuality, innocence and immaturity. As such, sexual activities involving an adult and someone within this age category is considered abusive, and equated to rape (O'Connell Davidson, 2005a).

Different scholars (Aries, 1996; Hendrick, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Cunningham, 2006; Montgomery, 2009a) capture evidence which to some extent hints that childhood, in accordance with the UNCRC's conceptualisation, is modelled on the notion that emerged among middle-class Western families in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing from historical evidence (Aries, 1996; Cunningham, 2005), it is during this period that bureaucratized constructions of the life-course saw childhood being perceived as a period of 'human-becoming', separated from adulthood. Montgomery (Montgomery, 2007, 2008b, 2009b) and O'Connell Davidson (2005a) respectively observe that drawing on this notion, the children's rights framework sets childhood

as a stage of immaturity, innocence, dependence, vulnerability, and asexuality. Montgomery (2008b) in particular points out that the UNCRC paints children as not being full human beings aware of what is happening around them; and not able to make (rational) choices and/or decisions like adults (Armitage, 2012).

The UNCRC's Articles 32, 34, 35 and 36 set a particular tone in discussions on child prostitution. Article 34 calls on countries to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse through measures that prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; and
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Article 32 demands that children are “protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous to or interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”. In the same way, Article 35 appeals for action to “prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form”; a motion first set under Article 11. Article 36, offering what can be considered as a summary of these three other Articles as well as a general outlook of what the whole UNCRC aims to address, and calls for the protection of any child “against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare”.

It is against this background that the Convention is considered not only as the milestone in contemporary notions of childhood but also in efforts to curb children’s involvement in prostitution (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; James and Prout, 1997; Verhellen, 2000; Montgomery,

2001; O’Connell Davidson, 2005a; Ennew, 2008). Children, as defined by the UNCRC, are thought to be incapable of consenting to sex or making decisions about sex. It is believed that children do not “cross over into sexuality” until they are 18, which Melrose argues, “renders adolescent engagement in sexual activity before that age somewhat problematic” (2013, p. 13). Thus, as Melrose (2013, p. 12) puts it while in agreement with O’Connell Davidson (2005a), “children are imagined as passive and incapable of independent action”. It is this conception of childhood that also serves as the yardstick for drawing child prostitution as sexual abuse, or separating prostitution involving children and adults. This is because any sexual activity involving those below the age of 18 is deemed as non-consensual and (equivalent to) rape. This argument is conveniently summarised: “We adults all agree that children need care and protection [to the extent that] we will not tolerate children being treated as commercial objects [for sex]” (O’Connell Davidson, 2005a, p. 22).

Building on the UNCRC, it was the adoption of *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (Optional Protocol)* (United Nations, 2000) that explicitly forged the need to protect children and young people against prostitution, demarcating the practice as sexual abuse. As Revaz (2001) explains, this is one of the two Optional Protocols to the UNCRC formulated with the aim of addressing some of the worst forms of human rights abuses against children and, as mentioned in the Chapter One, also signals a commitment among policy-makers globally to address child prostitution and all other practices that put children at the risk of CSEC including sex tourism (O’Grady, 1992; Andrews, 2004; Herold, 2005; Montgomery, 2008b; Chemin and Mbiekop,

2015). As captured in its preamble, countries ratifying the Optional Protocol make a commitment that they are:

“Gravely concerned at the significant and increasing international traffic of children for the purpose of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography [and are] deeply concerned at the widespread and continuing practice of sex tourism, to which children are especially vulnerable, as it directly promotes the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography” (United Nations, 2000, p. 1).

Overall, the children’s rights approach has been influential in setting a paradigm shift in the way child prostitution is discussed. Prior to the UNCRC, those involved in prostitution including children and young people were viewed as delinquent, a problem or nuisance to society (Barnardo’s, 1998; Montgomery, 2001a; Phoenix, 2002, 2007; Pearce, 2014). As noted by Phoenix(2002), (child) prostitution was responded to through the criminal justice as those involved were treated as offenders rather than victims. But this overview has gradually been changing following the UNCRC with different countries adopting the children’s rights approach and as more countries affirm their commitment to safeguard children from sexual exploitation including prostitution (Montgomery, 2001b, 2007, 2008b, Phoenix, 2001, 2002; Melrose, 2004). The framework has also been key in driving campaigns championed by international organizations to call for the protection of children as well as in raising awareness of the plight of children and young people involved in prostitution; separating child prostitution from adult prostitution (Barnardo’s 2009, 1998; ECPAT International 2008; Ennew 2008; UNICEF 2001; O’Grady 1992).

As a result of the children's rights framework, the position on child prostitution has shifted to one that all children and young people aged below 18 who are involved in prostitution are considered by welfare and the criminal justice system as victims of sexual abuse. Ennew (2008, pp. 9–10) observes that with this understanding, the general consensus, under the children's rights approach, is that children and young people are forced into selling sex. It is commonly agreed that "prostitution is something done to them [i.e., the children] and is linked to debates that assert that prostitution is always due to male violence typified by female (including child) *inability to consent*". The common theme that one draws from the literature on this topic is child prostitution is an outright form of sexual abuse.

### **3.2.2 Children Forced into Prostitution**

The common theme in the literature on child prostitution which also reinforces the worldview set by the children's rights framework is that children and young people are forced into prostitution. From consideration of the pathways into prostitution; experiences of involvement in prostitution; and characteristics of children and young people involved in prostitution, this image of passive victims is repeated.

**3.2.2.1. Pathways into involvement:** A wide variety of academic research and reports by NGOs working with children (O'Grady, 1992; Barnardo's, 1998, 2009; Estes and Weiner, 2001; UNICEF, 2001b; Farley, 2006; Orchard, 2007; Joffres *et al.*, 2008; Barnhart, 2009; Blackburn, Taylor and Davis, 2010; Fong and Berger Cardoso, 2010; Hepburn and Simon, 2010; Abuya *et al.*, 2011; Brayley, Cockbain and Laycock, 2011; Newman *et al.*, 2011; Posner, Kendall and Funk, 2011; Melrose *et al.*, 2013; Pearce, Hynes and Bovarnick, 2013; Alonso, 2014; Brayley

and Cockbain, 2014; Chemin and Mbiekop, 2015; Cole and Sprang, 2015; Hornor, 2015), shows that the commonly recognised routes to involvement in prostitution are understood to centre around trafficking, force, grooming, indenturing, coercion or manipulation, sex tourism and/or being targeted by both pimps and clients (with the latter often described as paedophiles targeting children in countries with weaker laws on child prostitution). This is particularly evident in a compilation of essays and presentations published by (UNICEF, 2001b) and a range of cases documented by Barnardos (2009) and ECPAT (Ecpat International, 2006b, 2011) two of the organisations that have a particular commitment to ending child prostitution. The notion that children are forced into prostitution is extended beyond children's inability to consent to sex to include the processes of involvement in prostitution that are most commonly described in the literature as young people being forced into the practice against their will or 'groomed'.

In a review of studies and articles, Pearce (2006, p. 327) describes the process of grooming: "the young person becomes the victim of an abusive adult with whom they fall in love. Their abuser 'grooms' them into depending upon them before encouraging or forcing them to sell sex, benefiting from this exchange and using the money earned or goods exchanged to their own advantage". In her review of a White Paper on child prostitution in the UK (Department of Health, 2000), Melrose makes a case for the adoption of the term 'commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)'. This echoes part of the Optional Protocol:

there is a need to employ a 'broad' definition of commercial sexual exploitation and to recognize that the term 'commercial sexual exploitation' can include: [T]he prostitution of children and young people; the production, sale, marketing and possession of pornographic material involving children; the distribution of pornographic pictures of

children over the Internet; trafficking in children; and sex tourism involving children (Melrose, 2004, p. 20).

This is why Ferranti (2007), while acknowledging that children possess agency, argues nonetheless that children and young people are lured into prostitution often having been in the streets as runaways, “leaving them vulnerable to the lures of prostitution” (2007, p. 14). She is of the view that many of these children and young people resort to selling their bodies for shelter, food, and to survive upon learning the harsh reality of the streets, in other words forced through harsh socioeconomic conditions. However, her argument marks a paradigm shift because it acknowledges that children can make choices. Ferranti insists that force may not always be physical and this is why children may seem to be making decisions when they are in fact being coerced, due to their desperation, into picking prostitution as they are left without alternative choices. Despite this argument, she retains the view that the being runaways or living on the streets, children and young people become vulnerable to ‘coercive force’ or groomed i.e. indirectly driven into the practice by someone they trust.

This is what leads to one of the common depictions of child prostitution as a betrayal of trust. This is particularly evident in two reports by Barnardo’s (Barnardo’s, 1998, 2009). While drawing on cases of children and young people in the UK with whom the organization works, Barnardo’s is of the view that children and young people involved in prostitution are physically or coercively forced into prostitution by pimps who pretend to be a boyfriend or someone with benign intentions. The reports list cases which, according to the organisation, capture common ways through which children and young people in the UK become forced into and are involved



in prostitution. Examples that feature prominently in the reports reveal that young girls in prostitution are groomed, coerced (by people the girls trust or consider friends or boyfriends), trafficked or sold for sex. The reports detail various horrific stories showing girls being controlled through manipulation or force. Some are detained in brothels where they are gang raped, forced to abuse drugs or even dumped to die in places where they are unlikely to be found. It is revealed in these reports that girls as young as nine years old are targeted by pimps and traffickers as well as punters. These girls are mostly those who have run away from their parents' homes, been looked after in residential care centers or foster homes, or been living within a dysfunctional household.

In these reports, Barnardo's draws on accounts from teenagers as well as people working with them to show what the organization considers "sophisticated" techniques that abusive adults such as clients, traffickers or pimps employ to entrap young girls. From these cases, the organization devised a set of models of involvement to illustrate how girls and young people are forced into prostitution: A girl goes missing/runs away from home/is in care and meets a boyfriend. He coerces her, starting the grooming process by making the girl become dependent on him. At this stage, the girl is controlled and/or frightened as well as forced to abuse drugs. The girl becomes (can be seen as) a "willing victim" who complies with her boyfriend's demands to sell sex to other people for him or as a sign of love (1998). The 'boyfriend' may be a pimp, trafficker or even a punter.

It is argued that some girls may not be consciously aware that they have been entrapped or coercively forced and trapped by abusers into prostitution. In opposing the idea that some

children and young people may voluntarily become involved in prostitution, as argued in its earlier report (1998), Barnardo's states that this is because:

"The involvement does not occur overnight. [Children and young people] may become more vulnerable if they are spending a lot of time away from home, from their care placement or from school because they are running away. Although many of these young people will stay with family or friends, others will find themselves in far riskier situations...Unhappy, lonely, young people are flattered and seduced by the attention of streetwise adults, who will appear to sympathize with their situation. In short, they become highly vulnerable to the well-rehearsed grooming techniques of abusing adults" (Barnardo's, 2009, p. 9).

Barnardo's repeatedly emphasizes that children (particularly young girls) who may be as young as eleven are forced into prostitution by "predatory" adults and that involvement in prostitution for girls is not voluntary (Barnardo's, 2009, p. 5). The organization argues that "Girls do not make their own decision to 'sell sex'. They are almost always shown a way into this world by an older person, usually a man" (1998, p. 11). The report acknowledges that children may not always be physically forced into prostitution but argues that where children do consider that they had joined prostitution without being (physically) forced, they show signs of distress and emotional disturbance.

Barnardo's rejects the term child prostitution, saying it implies that children and young people make informed choices and decisions, effectively consenting to being abused. This is also evident in the UNICEF (2001b) report where child prostitution is framed as a form of

‘organised’ crime devised by pimps<sup>4</sup>, johns<sup>5</sup>, paedophiles<sup>6</sup>, armed gangs or human traffickers.

This is the context through which child prostitution is thought to emerge and discussed in the US and other developed countries (see also Bang *et al.*, 2014). As the UNCRC puts it, commercial sexual exploitation of children has been used to refer to any sexual activity with a child in exchange of some form of remuneration given to the child or a third party (i.e., an adult who acts as a pimp, boyfriend, parent, and brothel owners among others).

Many writers (Blackburn, Taylor and Davis, 2010; Rand, 2010; Posner, Kendall and Funk, 2011; Brayley and Cockbain, 2014; Varma *et al.*, 2015) have discussed child prostitution as a form of organized crime and human trafficking. UNICEF views it as a “multibillion-dollar industry [in which] Children are coldly and calculatedly targeted for their marketability and cash value” (UNICEF, 2001b, p. 1).

Adding on to the discourse of trafficking, Andrews (2004) shows that there are other clients who travel abroad specifically to buy sex from children. While not trafficked, these children are understood to be coercively forced or lured by money from Western tourists. In contexts of extreme poverty some of these children are sold or indentured by their parents or an adult relative to a brothel or a pimp. Drawing on cases from the US criminal justice system on the USA responds to clients who engage children in other countries, Andrews (2004) depicts child prostitution as part of an organized form of sex tourism where children and young people,

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<sup>4</sup> Bang *et al.* (2014) define a pimp as the individual that procures, grooms, and markets a minor for prostitution.

<sup>5</sup> Johns is a term often used to refer to clients who go out seeking sexual services along the streets (Bang *et al.*, 2014)

<sup>6</sup> Pedophile or paedophile is a clinical term often used in the Global North by psychiatrists to refer to “an adult with a personality disorder that involves a specific and focused sexual interest in pre-pubertal children” (UNICEF, 2001b; O’Connell Davidson, 2005a; Ennew, 2008, p. 73).

instead of being trafficked from the global south, are targeted by clients (who are predominantly from the global north) who travel while posing as tourists but with the sole purpose of seeking sexual services from children and young people. She argues that this is because these sex tourists are able to escape prosecution in many host countries due to ineffective law enforcement, lack of resources, corruption, and immature legal systems. She also observes that developing countries that rely heavily on tourism as one of the main driving forces behind their economies deliberately ignore efforts to address child prostitution as this could affect earnings through tourism. She, however, acknowledges that local demand for commercial sex outweighs that by foreign tourists. Andrew shows that the legal context in different countries is crucial in shaping how children and young people become involved in prostitution (whether targeted by local or foreign clients).

**3.2.2.2 Experiences of involvement:** Various organizations (O’Grady, 1992; Barnardo’s, 1998; ECPAT International, 2008) show children involved in prostitution living in despicable circumstances. And documented evidence (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Children and America, 1992; Barrett, 1997b; Barnardo’s, 1998; Estes and Weiner, 2001; UNICEF, 2001b; Willis and Levy, 2002; Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2010; Rand, 2010; Jago *et al.*, 2011; Brown and Barrett, 2013; Pearce, Hynes and Bovarnick, 2013), reveals that children and young people involved in prostitution are likely to experience wide forms of abuse and exploitation including being chained in brothels, drugged, raped/gang raped and trafficked. Involvement in prostitution heightens children’s exposure to serious health, physical and psychological problems (Willis and Levy, 2002) and can even expose them to murder (Phoenix, 2002) torture, frequent experiences of physical and sexual abuse and recall of traumatic

memories of involvement, an overview that underpins children and young people's involvement in prostitution as exploitation (Barnardo's, 1998, 2009; Phoenix, 2002; Rafferty, 2008; Fong and Berger Cardoso, 2010).

Against this background, the phrase 'commercial sexual exploitation' is usually preferred by scholars or organizations who adopt this framework (Ennew, 2008; Barnardo's, 2009; Melrose *et al.*, 2013; e.g. Bang *et al.*, 2014). With such experiences, child prostitution is conceptualized as exploitation of children and young people. Critiques of this view (Melrose, 2004, 2013; Ennew, 2008; Pearce, 2009, 2014; Melrose *et al.*, 2013), identify interests in highlighting children's inherent exploitation or victimhood and their need for care and protection rather than punishment or treatment as young offenders. Melrose's (2004) argument is that children and young people are sexually exploited and abused not only because of their involvement in prostitution but also by virtue of their age and need for care and protection. This argument is reflected in Chase and Statham's description of CSEC as referring to "practices by which a person, usually an adult, achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a child's sexuality by abrogating that child's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy and physical and mental well-being" (Chase and Statham, 2005, p. 7). Bang *et al.* (2014, p. 17) describe child prostitution as "an egregious violation of human rights and arguably the most deplorable and horrific abuse a child can endure". They argue that this is because the practice involves coercion of children who are economically, cognitively, psychologically, and socially vulnerable. The use of the UNCRC definition of a child (anyone under 18) as the basis for interpreting child prostitution as sexual abuse is founded on the view that children are asexual as well as "emotionally, physically and cognitively immature [they are, therefore], unable to

consent to sexual acts” (Bang *et al.*, 2014, p. 17). It is for this reason that Bang *et al.* consider children and young people’s involvement in prostitution as a form of CSEC. As with Pearce’s (2006) argument what we see here is an image of children who are passive, not fully aware of what is being done to them.

Likewise, scholars like Rand (2010) have bought into the terminology debate, arguing that the term child prostitution denotes choice on the part of children. Rand is of the view that most children are recruited and forced into prostitution where they are controlled and forced against their will to engage in sexual activities. She considers the term prostitution as diluting the victimhood of children. She argues that calling children prostitutes “implies that she willingly sold her body for money and made a conscious choice to do so” (2010, p. 140). Melrose and Pearce (2013) offer a similar explanation on why they adopt the term child sexual exploitation over child prostitution in a compilation of essays by different scholars who discuss CSEC in the UK (Melrose *et al.*, 2013). Their choice of terminology reinforces the discourse set by the UNCRC of child prostitution as an inherent act of child sexual abuse or exploitation.

Margaret Melrose, whose work is also founded on the children’s rights discourse, offers the same argument in her conceptualization of child prostitution as exploitation and abuse:

“When young people are involved in commercial sexual exploitation, this renders them vulnerable to being preyed on in other ways – for example, through drug misuse – and involvement in damaging social networks. It also exposes them to other forms of exploitation...those men who are involved in the commercial sexual abuse of children, whether by paying for their ‘services’ or by forcing them into prostitution, are frequently

involved in other serious crimes such as drug-dealing...They are often ruthless and very dangerous men” (2004, p. 20).

With this understanding, Melrose concurs with the UK Sexual Offences Act that places “the onus of responsibility for the commercial sexual exploitation of children squarely (and correctly) with the adults who abuse and exploit them” (2004, p. 19, see also 2013). Melrose’s argument, in agreement with Pearce (2000), UK Department of Health (2000) and Barnardo’s (1998) is that no child would make a “free economic or moral choice’ [to] ‘be abused’ through prostitution” (2004, p. 19). Barnardo’s (1998, p. 19) drawing on the experience of involvement which leads many to being raped, left for dead, forced to abuse drugs among other experience of involvement, argues similarly that “a girl cannot consent to her own abuse”. While sociological and anthropological evidence (Montgomery, 2001; Phoenix, 2001; which we see in O’Connell Davidson, 2005a; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005) reveal that there are some children and young people who may have voluntarily joined prostitution, Melrose’s key argument is that children and young people involved in prostitution are sexually abused, targeted and recruited by people (often with a sexual desire for children), physically or coercively forced; and that these children are prostituted against their will by and/or to adults.

**3.2.2.3 Characteristics of children and young people:** Another feature of the literature is its focus on the characteristics of those involved in prostitution. While a slight departure of the ‘delinquent’ or ‘deviant’ view in which children and young people involved in prostitution are conceptualised as a social problem to be fixed (Bour, Young and Henningsen, 2014) – a pathological view is also evident in the literature. This explains children’s involvement in

prostitution as being the outcome of a difficult upbringing including broken families and a history of sexual abuse during childhood (Estes and Weiner, 2001).

Although similar arguments are made in relation to adults involved in prostitution, a key difference lies in argument that adults are able to consent to sex<sup>7</sup>, a theme that seems to dominate discussions about adult sex work. On the other hand, discussion of structural factors driving child prostitution has been limited to poverty and sees involvement in prostitution as a survival strategy. However some scholars (Montgomery, 2001; O’Connell Davidson, 2005a; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005) show that there are varied reasons and dynamics of involvement for children and young people. As the section that follows shows, there are gaps and limitations in attempting to make sense of child prostitution through a ‘children’s rights’ lens.

### **3.2.3 Gaps within the Children’s Rights Approach to Child Prostitution**

I identified a number of grey areas with the children’s rights framework; which relate to: (i) the depiction of children as a single group (which builds on a normative concept of childhood); this, in turn, leads to: (ii) certain categories of individuals not being actively and critically engaged in discussing their own involvement on the basis of the belief that: (iii) all children and young people involved in prostitution become involved in the same manner (trafficking, sold, indentured, groomed or pimped, controlled, i.e. they are prostituted). This implies that experiences of involvement are the same and require the same ‘rescue’ response which in turn: (iv) ignores the need to contextualise child prostitution. Each of these grey areas has an impact on the way child prostitution is understood.

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<sup>7</sup> As I will show under Section 3.3 where I examine feminist views of prostitution, the argument that those above 18 years old can consent to sex and that, therefore, adult prostitution is not exploitative has also been challenged.



Firstly, the conceptualisation of childhood as a universal notion as stipulated under the UNCRC has opened up room for questioning of the children's rights discourse on child prostitution. A number of writers (Levine *et al.*, 1996; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; O'Connell Davidson, 2005a; Cunningham, 2006; see Montgomery, 2008b) show that childhood is a social construct and that the notion has varied considerably historically and across cultures. Yet, the children's rights discourse constructs children and young people involved in prostitution as "a distinct and unitary group that stands in particular need of looking after" (O'Connell Davidson, 2005, p. 140; Montgomery, 2009; 2007). Melrose (2013) highlights that the conceptualization of children's involvement in prostitution as child sexual exploitation or child sexual abuse is predicated on the discourse of 'childhood' that dominates Western thought about 'children'. In this regard, drawing on Powell (2010, p. 174 cited on 2013, p. 10), Melrose argues that "the idea of childhood on which the child sexual exploitation discourse is predicated imagines children as dependent, innocent, pure, unable to exercise choice and unable to enter contracts". As Pitcher (1996, p. 79) points out, "Western ideologies around sexuality and childhood mean that the pairing of "children" with "sex" is 'morally inappropriate' [because] children are [considered] asexual, innocent and pure". Some researchers (Montgomery, 2001, 2007; O'Connell Davidson, 2005a; Ennew, 2008) argue that this conceptualization underpins the view that children and young people involved in prostitution are a homogenous group requiring the same interventions and that efforts to understand child prostitution while drawing on this homogeneity results in paying little detail to the lived experiences of those involved in the practice.

Secondly, Melrose acknowledges that this framework has the potential of offering an abstract overview of child prostitution and the experiences of children and young people involved in the practice. Like Phoenix (2002), Melrose observes that discussions underpinned by the framework tend to overlook how/that structural specificities shape people's day-to-day lives, and in turn, their involvement in prostitution. She contends that the discourse:

directs attention away from the social, economic and cultural arrangements and processes that render young people vulnerable to involvement in commercial sex markets. It thereby obscures wider concerns with young people's poverty and socio-economic disadvantage: the very factors that, in conjunction with other dynamics and experiences, underpin involvement in those markets (2013, p. 10).

Elsewhere, Melrose (2010) offers another critique that this conceptualization tends to overlook the agency of children and young people. She observes that the dominant position on child prostitution tends "to assume that young people are incapable of acting under their own volition [as] capacity to exercise agency has vanished" (2010, p. 18). This widely accepted explanation is that all children and young people aged below 18 who are involved in prostitution are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and they become involved because they are forced, targeted, controlled, groomed, or trafficked. Slightly shifting from her earlier position (2004), Melrose illustrates that this perspective offers an abstract understanding of child prostitution by overlooking socioeconomic, structural, political and ideological circumstances in a particular time and place that inform and/or make children and young people's involvement in prostitution possible. In other words, the children's rights discourse is challenged for limiting other possible lenses through which we could generate a meaningful understanding of child prostitution or of

the lived experiences of the children and young people who are engaged in the practice as well as how their involvement comes about. It is for this reason that she argues:

“This tautological reasoning closes down the theoretical space in which we may conceive of those involved in sex work as exercising agency and making decisions for themselves – albeit decisions taken within a severely constrained set of socio-economic circumstances... This paradigm provides us with a partial, ahistorical and decontextualised explanation which masquerades as a universal ‘truth’ and which pretends to explain the involvement of all young people at all times and in all places” (2010, p. 17).

A number of other scholars such as Phoenix (Phoenix, 2002, 2012), Montgomery (Montgomery, 2007, 2009b, 2010) O’Connell Davidson (2005a) also offer a general comment that challenge the framing of prostitution as an inherent form of sexual exploitation. Phoenix (2012) shows that some of those involved in prostitution make personal decisions and chose prostitution. Like Ennew (2008), Phoenix reveals how young people in different situations as well as structural conditions make decisions in regards to selling sex. Melrose, drawing on O’Connell Davidson (1998) depicts involvement as a failure of ‘social welfare policy’ to cater for all people or adequately meet the needs of those who are supported through the welfare state. To this end, Melrose concludes that the children’s rights approach does not offer a meaningful way of understanding child prostitution because specific contextual factors are not taken into consideration. She notes that the conceptualization of child prostitution within the CSE framework “positions the young people concerned as always and inevitably passive victims/objects and thereby tells only particular and partial truths about them”. A similar

trajectory is projected by Pearce (2000) who looks at how children from various parts of Europe became in prostitution.

The framing of children and young people involved in prostitution as victims of trafficking has also yielded questions. Jo Doezema (2010) has challenged the conceptualization of child prostitution within discourses of human trafficking or sex slavery (i.e. the trafficking of children and young women for prostitution/sex). She argues that much as there are some people who are trafficked for prostitution, not all people are trafficked for this purpose. As Phoenix, O'Connell Davidson and, Doezema conclude, not all those who are involved in prostitution are in fact forced into the practice. Bang *et al.* make a similar argument: While drawing on Scarpa (2006), they explain:

Children who are trafficked may find themselves involved in prostitution, pornography, child labour, domestic servitude, debt bondage, street begging, drug trafficking, service in armed conflicts, illegal adoptions, and organ trafficking (2014, p. 11)

It is apparent that those who are trafficked do not always end up in prostitution. Sara Rafferty's (2008) critical analysis of child trafficking in Southeast Asia reaches the conclusion that not all children are trafficked for prostitution (and that not all children become involved in prostitution through human trafficking). She also shows that trafficking takes many forms and is practised and responded to differently in different countries (Pearce, 2000, see also 2011).

Despite similarities and interlocking features, Rafferty illustrates why human/child trafficking and child prostitution need not be treated as the same phenomena, although she accepts that

children are routinely trafficked for prostitution in Southeast Asia, which could reinforce the image of children and young people involved in prostitution as victims of human trafficking involving coercive and deceptive means:

[they] are forced to work under conditions of slavery in brothels with filthy and abusive living conditions. It is the element of coercion, deception and exploitation resulting in victims being subjected to exploitation of services or slavery that characterises trafficking (Rafferty, 2008, p. 408)

Ennew (2008) delivers a similar argument. She argues that the “focus on trafficking and sex tourism obscures the mechanisms of the exploitation of children in prostitution in local contexts” (2008, p. 15). Much as she considers child prostitution as exploitation, she delivers the following point:

“Although the issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of children is increasingly recognized, the exploitation of children in prostitution is increasingly obscured. The discourses of both sex tourism and trafficking need to be deconstructed so that a distinct discourse on the exploitation of children in prostitution can emerge. This would illuminate the exploitative transactions involved rather than the migration patterns of tourism and trafficking, which only involve some (possibly a minority) of children exploited in prostitution. A further obscuring factor is the incorrect use of the clinical term ‘paedophile’ to refer to all customers of children exploited in prostitution” (2008, pp. 18–20).

Also, most studies of child prostitution have relied on service providers including the police (Pearce, 2000; Andrews, 2004; Barnardo's, 2009; Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2010; For example, see: Bang *et al.*, 2014) or reports by, or produced on behalf of, organizations working with the aim of rescuing children from prostitution (O'Grady, 1992; UNICEF, 2001b; see also: ECPAT International, 2008; Ennew, 2008). This, O'Connell Davidson (2005a) and Montgomery (Montgomery, 2001b, 2007) argue, has resulted in discussions on child prostitution not critically engaging children or young people to talk about their own involvement within specific social, economic, political and ideological contexts. This results in a biased, stereotypical overview and generalized framework of child prostitution. Montgomery (Montgomery, 2001a, 2001b, 2007) questions the credibility of some of the claims around child prostitution. She argues that studies of child prostitution are often carried out and/or commissioned by (Western based) charity organizations working to stop the involvement of children and young people in prostitution (O'Connell Davidson, 2005a; ECPAT International, 2008; Ennew, 2008).

She notes that many NGOs deliberately offer sensationalized as well as generalized claims without the support of robust evidence. While the evidence undeniably captures the experience of some children and young people, O'Connell Davidson (2005a) argues that such evidence is carefully crafted to fit the organizations' particular interests or goals to protect children. The aim for crafting involvement in this particular way, it is argued, is intended to retain the image that those under the age of 18 years are prostituted (Phoenix, 2002). In her research on young women involved in prostitution in the UK, she found that some of the participants had chosen to engage in prostitution. This argument, that children are capable of making their own decisions, is central to O'Connell Davidson's (2005a) work. Montgomery and O'Connell Davidson note respectively

that adopting perspectives that are critical of the children's rights approach to child prostitution can be interpreted as: "[permitting] the crimes [of child sexual exploitation and abuse] by looking the other way" (UNICEF, 2001b, p. 2). However, a critical approach that identifies value positions that can easily influence argument shaped by particular discourses is crucial to extending knowledge and understanding of child prostitution and identifying effective ways of supporting children and young people involved in prostitution to effectively leave prostitution or addressing the structural factors that make them consider prostitution.

Phoenix (2002, p. 353) also draws the same argument from her analysis of guidance on child prostitution in the UK (Department of Health, 2000) which she considers to have set a paradigm shift from viewing children involved in prostitution as delinquents and offenders to victims in need of protection. She argues that the White Paper, founded on the UNCRC, "occludes the material and social realities that structure youth prostitution". It is against this background that Melrose also argues what this discourse "does not provide is a means to understand the often messy, complex, realities that underpin the lives of those who become involved" (Melrose 2010 p.18).

Just like Melrose, Phoenix is of the view that the dominant children's rights framework cannot account for a contextualised understanding of child prostitution because it overlooks agency and structural issues such as cultural norms, power structures and sexual relations shaping children and young people's experiences and involvement in prostitution. Awareness of these, she argues, is particularly important in efforts intended to examine and understand child prostitution. Similarly, Phoenix (2002, p. 354) argues that:

basing policies on a construction of young people involved in prostitution as always and already victims creates the conditions in which:

- i. the general realities of their lives are subsumed by the notion of their victimhood; and,
- ii. the specificities of their victimization marginalized.

Phoenix challenges the grouping of children and young people involved in prostitution into a binary categorisation with the same experiences or means of involvement (either as victims for those *forced* or *offenders* for those who voluntarily join). She argues that this underpinning forecloses the possibility of understanding specific conditions that structure child prostitution, and the involvement of children and young people in prostitution, as well as the experiences resulting from such involvement, merely on the basis that the practice is depicted as an inherent form of child sexual abuse based on age. Phoenix strongly believes that any effort to garner a meaningful understanding of (child) prostitution ought to take into account social, economic, political and ideological specificities (Phoenix, 2001, 2012).

In summarizing this section, I started by showing that the UNCRC has dominated discussions on child prostitution; revealing why the practice is constituted as child sexual exploitation on the basis that children and young people aged below 18 years cannot consent to sex as they are asexual and immature. The result is that discussions on prostitution tend to disregard children and young people's own accounts of their engagement and involvement in prostitution. Very few studies have attempted to engage those involved in prostitution in making sense of their own lived experiences of involvement and how their involvement come about. And, as argued by Montgomery (Montgomery, 2001b, 2007, 2008b, 2010) and O'Connell Davidson (2005a), when



children and young people involved in prostitution do recount their experiences, the risk of engaging them to support particular adult perspectives is very high (Barnardo's, 1998, for example, see 2009) ignoring wider contextual factors to produce a one dimensional image of child prostitution. In this way, the importance of engaging those who are involved in prostitution, of listening to their own stories and experiences of involvement, is easily diluted.

By overlooking issues of structure and agency in children's involvement in prostitution, it is argued that the children's rights framework lacks the possibility of offering a nuanced understanding of child prostitution. This becomes clear when feminist perspectives and structure and agency perspectives on prostitution, discussed in the following two sections, are considered. These perspectives offer insights into why it is important not to treat people involved in prostitution, including children, as passive victims or to ignore the broader structural contexts of involvement in prostitution.

### **3.3 Feminist Perspectives on Prostitution**

In this section, I examine feminist perspectives on prostitution which have developed in response to the moralist discourse. I therefore touch briefly on the moralist discourse before discussing radical feminist argument that focuses on male violence and commercial sexual exploitation, and liberal feminist argument which constitutes prostitution as sex work.

#### **3.3.1 Responses to the Moralist View: Prostitution as Immoral and a Social Problem**

The moralist view has shaped the ways in which prostitution has typically been approached within criminal justice systems in many countries. Prostitution is treated as a practice involving

morally problematic women who corrupt innocent men. The understanding is that prostitution is a sexual behaviour regarded as sinful, morally wrong, or objectionable for reasons of conscience, religious and/or cultural norms, making it reprobated on these grounds (Phoenix, 2007; Melrose *et al.*, 2013).

Phoenix notes that the framing of prostitution as an offence, public nuisance or morally wrong has been the force behind the criminalization and prohibition of prostitution leading to the criminal prosecution of women involved in prostitution in many countries. This view is often held in contexts of conservatism and strong religious beliefs such as Malawi where prostitution was not decriminalized until a High Court ruling in 2016 (Ligomeka, 2016, p. 24).

The moralist discourse has long been challenged by feminists for treating those involved in prostitution as a single deviant group, overlooking the fact that many women enter prostitution as a result of factors beyond their control, through exploitation, coercion and trafficking. The inherent pathological characterization of women involved in prostitution that typifies the moralist discourse is strongly challenged by feminist writers (see Phoenix, 2001) who argue that this discourse not only overlooks “those who extort, exploit, control and/or intimidate women in prostitution” (Phoenix (2007, p. 79) but also reinforces the paternalist view of women through unequal treatment within the criminal justice system where those who are exploited rarely seek or achieve justice; allowing pimps, human traffickers and exploitative clients to remain unchallenged in law (Phoenix, 2007). I now look at the feminist perspectives, beginning with the radical feminist view in the section that follows and the liberal feminist perspective in Section 3.3.3.

### **3.3.2 Radical Feminist View: Prostitution as Male Violence and Commercial Sexual**

#### **Exploitation**

The radical feminist perspective frames prostitution as male driven violence and exploitation of women, and is depicted as the male-gendered violence discourse (Phoenix, 2001, 2007, 2012).

This argument rests on the perspective that society is paternalistically structured, creating a power imbalance where men control women who occupy powerless, peripheral positions with very limited opportunities. This influences women's choices to be involved in prostitution where they are treated by men as objects for sexual pleasure (Phoenix, 2001). On one hand, the radical feminist perspective claims that, as a result of this power imbalance, involvement in prostitution constitutes exploitation of women's sexuality on the basis that it undermines women's human dignity set out in the UDHR (1948) (Phoenix, 2007, 2012; Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009). Like the children's rights perspective, proponents of this feminist position stress that "choosing sex work is impossible [and that] sex work is *per se* a human rights abuse, and thus choice is negated, irrelevant" (Doezema, 2010, p. 25; Narag and Maxwell, 2009; Phoenix, 2007). This position emphasizes the exercise of paternalistic power over femininity as a catalyst for exploitation with social masculinities shaped by socioeconomic structure, impunity and privilege, influencing the objectification of women's sexuality (Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009; Higate, 2007).

The radical discourse, like the moralist view, advocates for the prohibition of the prostitution, but for very different reasons. While the moralist view is associated with prohibition through the criminalization of women, the feminist argument is that prostitution constitutes (sexual) violence

against women with men treating women as sexual objects, degrading the human dignity of women (Phoenix, 2012)(Ennew, 2008, p. 13). Like the children's rights approach, the notion of sexual abuse is central, but based on gender rather than age and widely argued that women are forced, coerced and controlled by *abusive* men into selling sex where they are also subjected to other forms of abuse and victimization (Phoenix, 2001).

The common argument is that no woman would voluntarily turn herself into a transactionable object. Drawing on an ethnographic study by Hoigard and Finstad (1992), Phoenix notes that under this feminist view:

women's involvement in prostitution [is explored] in terms of financial and physical coercion. For example, it could be argued that women are forced into prostitution through violence. Prostitutes are represented as 'casualties' of a male-dominated system, in that they are women with few if any resources to resist the social forces that sexually commodify all women (Phoenix, 2001, p. 61).

With women viewed as 'objects' of male oppression, another form of exploitation of those involved in prostitution is manifest. The argument is that women involved in prostitution undergo further exploitation at the hands of abusive/violent males such as being physically assaulted, raped, sold by other men or forced to abuse drugs as a means of control. Such women are believed to be trafficked or controlled through violence and intimidation by the pimps while being treated as sexual slaves, an argument similar to that of the children's rights approach (Phoenix, 2007). Here, explains Phoenix, women are viewed as 'being prostituted' into sex, regardless of whether they make a decision themselves or are forced. The difference is that,

unlike other women who are also dominated by men, the level of violence or domination by men over women involved in prostitution is seen as much greater. It is for this reason that prostitution is framed as constituting “a gross form of violence” (Hoigard and Finstad, 1992, p. 116 cited in Phoenix 2001, p. 67).

Against this background, proponents of the prohibition of prostitution seek to protect women from such forms of sexual abuse and male driven violence/exploitation on women’s sexuality. In contrast with moralist views, this radical position views women involved in prostitution as victims rather than offenders or delinquents. The core argument of this position is that women are forced into prostitution and that most of those involved are either trafficked or sold into the sex industry (Phoenix, 2007; Doezema, 2010). Despite adopting a similar line of argument, the children’s rights perspective does not construct children’s involvement in prostitution as ‘exploitation’ on the basis of children’s objectification of their sexuality. Proponents of the radical perspective advocate for the prohibition of prostitution to ensure women’s dignity as well as protection of women from abusive and other exploitative experiences.

Like the moralist view, the radical discourse is challenged on the basis that it groups all women involved in prostitution into one category with similar experiences where clients are perceived as men and always violent by virtue of their gender. But as explored under Section 3.3.3 (p.63), this argument has been challenged by a number of scholars (Phoenix, 2001; Sanders, O’Neill and Pitcher, 2009; Doezema, 2010; See Phoenix, Brown and Walklate, 2012). Phoenix argues that by making prostitutes’ experiences as victims of men’s violence the defining characteristic of prostitutes and prostitution, “the theoretical space for a discussion of non-victimised prostitutes

or prostitutes who do not see themselves as victims” becomes closed (Phoenix, 2001, p. 67).

While acknowledging that involvement cannot be understood outside structural conditions, Phoenix argues that this is not always on the basis of gender. She sees such a theoretical framework not only as silencing women’s agency and women’s sense of their own lives and experiences of involvement in prostitution, but also as fixing the context through which their involvement comes about, outside the paternalistic structures of society.

“The portrayal of prostitutes as ‘symbolic victims of violence against women’, and their suggestion that ‘prostitution is a matter of violence’ provokes questions about the specific conditions that structure the ways in which prostitutes make sense of their status as ‘victims’”(Phoenix, 2001, p. 68, 2007, see also her other work 2012).

Her argument is that involvement in prostitution is an economic choice particularly because women’s economic opportunities are limited due to different factors some of which are driven by gender. Another weakness of this discourse is that it treats all women involved in prostitution as passive as well as assuming similar experiences of prostitution and similar needs for support (Phoenix, 2012; Doezema, 2010). Recent evidence (Sanders, O’Neill and Pitcher, 2009; Doezema, 2010) however, shows that not all women involved in prostitution are victims of human trafficking, forced or controlled; and that neither do they all undergo the same experiences of victimization. This gap has led to a liberal position that sees women as active agents but with paternalistic factors confining them to particular activities.

The radical feminist perspective has been challenged by liberal feminist theorists and activists who promote sex workers’ rights. Doezema (2010), Campbell *et al.* (2006), Kempado *et al.*

(2005; 1998) and Bindman (1997) have argued that women possess the ability to exercise agency and make rational decisions albeit within constrained choices. Their respective arguments challenge the view that all women in prostitution are prostituted, forced against their will and subjected to exploitative and abusive conducts, but acknowledge that the recognition of gendered-structural inequalities has opened up space for understanding women's involvement or position in society. The radical feminist argument against prostitution on the basis of the objectification of those engaged in the practice on the basis of gender contrasts with the children's rights approach where the focus is on power differentials based on age.

Developing this review of the literature, the gaps identified within the radical feminist/male violence discourse have been fundamental to the development of structural discourses of prostitution which will be discussed following a review of the liberal feminist position.

### **3.3.3 Liberal Feminist View: Prostitution as Agency**

The liberal feminist perspective maintains the argument that society is paternalistically structured which constrains economic opportunities for women. However, in contrast to the radical feminist view that considers women involved in prostitution as 'being prostituted', liberal feminism focuses on women's agency. Proponents of this school of thought argue that some women decide to engage in prostitution as a means of earning a living with the intention of overcoming their deprivation and constraints. And the view that all the women are forced into prostitution against their will, be it through human trafficking or some kind of physical or coercive force, or controlled by pimps or clients is challenged (Doezema, 2010).

However, like the radical discourse, this perspective also retains the view that society is paternalistically structured. This, it is argued, puts women in a “disadvantaged social position” resulting in constrained opportunities for women (McLeod, 1992, pp. 1-2 cited in Phoenix, 2001, p. 53). McLeod argues that such factors tend to obstruct women from mainstream economic activities to earn a living. As a result, they embark on ‘gendered roles’ with some deciding to utilize their sexuality by selling sex as a means of earning a living as well as surviving the paternalistically instigated discrimination against them. Thus, involvement in prostitution is depicted as a means of coping with gendered structural inequalities against women who, as a way of earning a living and being independent from men, occupy available roles based on gender-structural factors, such as prostitution. Women in prostitution are depicted as making use of roles on the basis of their feminine gender.

Within this perspective women are perceived as engaging in prostitution as a means to address their disadvantaged position and to meet their responsibilities, such as supporting children, without having to be dependent on a male breadwinner. Structural conditions and women’s agency are core to this perspective. However, women’s choices to engage in prostitution are also predicated on their ability to recognize and use what society has already ‘allocated or limited to them’. While challenging the discourse that perceive women selling sex as deviant, Phoenix (2001, p. 54) notes that the liberal feminist discourse sees, “involvement in prostitution is a rational economic act, resisting women’s relative poverty [and that] prostitution is a chosen economic activity”. The liberal feminist position views involvement in prostitution as women’s efforts to build resilience, to be independent and/or as an indicator of women’s struggle for work in all societies that are paternalistic in nature. This position is important as it recognizes ‘non-



objectification' forms of exploitation that women experience. Prostitution is, thus, understood neither as a form of sexual violence nor a practice that dehumanizes women. The argument is that the ends justify the means. There is, however, acknowledgment that prostitution can be exploitative. Whereas commercial sexual exploitation is preferred by those who adopt the gender-driven victimization discourse, proponents of the liberal approach use the language of sex work to signify women's agency and power.

The liberal discourse further acknowledges that sex work is a very risky means of work. In her critical discussion, Phoenix shows that as much as women devise efforts to manage and overcome 'exploitation', they may still be exploited due to the deep-rooted gendered structural inequalities. In this regard, efforts that women adopt to overcome their social oppression are hampered even further through structural factors and cultural norms that may include male privilege and power over females.

With this understanding, calls are made to protect women from abusive and exploitative experiences of involvement, including bringing an end to arbitrary detention, physical, emotional and other sexual abusive acts. The decriminalization of prostitution is advocated with calls demanding the recognition of the practice as work that deserves well stipulated guidelines to protect women against other forms of abuse at the hand of clients (Phoenix, 2012), and this perspective calls for the criminalization of various exploitative practices. In this regard, this perspective has driven calls for the protection of women, like other workers, against any form of exploitation that they could be subjected to such as trafficking and other abusive experiences of involvement (Bindman and Doezema, 1997; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998; Doezema, 2010).

There is acknowledgment that women involved in prostitution encounter different experiences and that they need to be supported. This position is one that is furthered under the structure and agency perspective that I discuss in the section that follows.

The liberal feminist position has been challenged over its emphasis on prostitution as a women-only practice as well as limiting understanding of involvement to a means of earning a living as a means of survival (Phoenix, Brown and Walklate, 2012). Phoenix (2001) argues that women's decisions to engage in prostitution and their experiences of involvement may be shaped by specific conditions such as race, sexuality, culture or class and that not all women experience the same level of suppression. She argues that a combination of factors shape people's positions or vulnerabilities and not all of these are linked to a gendered violence perspective (Phoenix (2001). The perspective has also been criticized by radical feminist theorists for embracing patriarchal privilege which may facilitate exploitation of women on the basis of gender related vulnerabilities (Doezema, 2010).

The liberal feminist perspective focuses on addressing why women decide to become involved in prostitution. Much as this is one of the key questions to understanding prostitution in general, the involvement of men or children (the focus of the empirical study that follows) is generally overlooked. The omission of consideration of children's involvement is deliberate with the consensus being that child prostitution entails child sexual abuse and including them in this category would hint at the possibility of children choosing prostitution (Phoenix, 2001, 2007; Ennew, 2008). The liberal position then, does not address children's agency. In her examination of how prostitution has been governed in the UK, Phoenix (2007, p. 86) noted that while

measures were taken to acknowledge prostitution as a form of work, some policy interventions set a line of demarcation between adults and children involved in prostitution with the latter expected to “be treated as victims of child abuse and sexual abuse and offered support and care through statutory child protection procedures and services”. She argues that prostitution can better be understood by taking into account specific historical, cultural, political, legal and economic conditions, setting the foundations for an examination of prostitution in the context of structure and agency debates.

Both feminist perspectives, radical and liberal, see prostitution as something that involves only females who are expected to be adults. Ennew (2008) argues that these discourses overlook other structural considerations such as age as well as the contextual factors that shape the involvement and experiences of children, young and adult women in prostitution. While in agreement with Kempadoo and Doezema (1998), Ennew (2008 p.12) contends that “insisting on the primacy of gender as the basis of analysis of prostitution is effectively discrimination against children” since while gender perspectives encourage the view that all men are ‘perpetrators’ this marginalizes consideration of children’s involvement in prostitution.

“Gender analysis is insufficient for either describing or explaining the exploitation of children in prostitution. Focus on prostitution as violence against women ignores violence against children in general, especially against boys, obscuring the violence and exploitation practised by women against children” (Ennew, 2008, p. 18).

Ennew offers evidence that shows that even in places where reports of children being sold or driven into selling sex against their will, perpetrators and victims have diverse characteristics and

circumstances. Calls for researchers to make sense of prostitution through the active participation of those who are involved in prostitution within specific contexts are central to structure and agency discussions on prostitution which I discuss in the section that follows.

### **3.4 Structural Perspectives**

In this section, I discuss the relevance of the structure and agency debate to understandings of prostitution. This position is set in Giddens' (1986) theory of structuration. The key argument is that people are active agents, aware of and always negotiating with different situations – structural issues. This creates what can be seen as a reciprocal relationship between agency and structure as individuals are constantly negotiating social structures, and the exercise of agency in turn can have an influence on structures. Social structures are not always under the control of individual actors and awareness of structures is required in order to act, or in other words, exercise agency. With an emphasis on both structural specificities and human agency, the structure/agency framework offers a means of developing further understanding of (child) prostitution since it widens the way decision making can be understood and how particular structures operate or drive actors to make particular decisions. New (1994, p. 188) extends Giddens' argument that "social structures are external to individuals in two senses: firstly, they predate them, secondly, they represent, by their enabling and constraining functions, the possibilities for and limitations on individuals' actions", by noting the spiral interconnection of these two forms. She argues: "social structures only exist by virtue of individuals' actions, through which they are continually recreated-not necessarily in the same form". This (the resulting structure), she notes, recreates or reshapes the way people exercise agency which recreates another form leading to an argument that action is an outcome of *post hoc*

*rationalization*; that “the continued existence of society and the form it takes in future depends on human activity: we do not create it, but through our actions we reproduce or transform it” (New, 1994, p. 188). She also draws on Marx who stated: Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please: *they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances...given and transmitted from the past* (Marx 1968, p. 97 in New, 1994, p. 188 [my emphasis]). New’s view is that “structure determines what range of options [one] is faced with” (New, 1994, p. 189). But like the others, she argues that actors are presented with options to act in one way rather than the other on the basis of intended outcomes or motives or/on available alternatives which are enabled or constrained by same structural issues. However, this does not mean that all decisions taken are an outcome of actors exercising agency on the basis of conditions/structural surrounding them.

As Giddens argues, agency implies an individual’s power and control over their decisions, awareness of the conditions around them, thinking through possible actions and ways of acting within a particular situation. This means that the decisions they make are intentionally or rationally taken with the aim of a certain desirable outcome. Drawing further on Giddens, New (1994) argues that negotiations in regards to why and how to act in a particular way while in a particular situation:

contribute both to the motivation and to the rationalisation of our actions. Rationalisation here means the process of contemporary or post hoc identification of certain reasons or states of mind as the causes of an action, and does not imply that this identification is always spurious. However, rationalization is also a justifying process that takes account of what reasons are socially acceptable. For that and for other reasons it may not give an

accurate, and will never give a complete account of what brought about the action. Some conditions of action remain unacknowledged.

Thus, as active agents the process of acting is neither static nor linear but involves being aware of structural conditions and what action, or absence of it, entails - *knowingly* or intentionally acting on structural specificities. Rather, it involves what Paternoster & Pogarsky (2009) explain as involving reflexive monitoring. In other words, agency involves making and modifying actions in the context of a continuous chain of intention or purposes; actions shaped by these intentions and structural situations; the actual structural factors to have influenced the acting in the first place; and the reflexive monitoring of all these axes. For Paternoster & Pogarsky (2009), thoughtfully acting on something involves engaging one's rationality and reflecting on the possible social problem and decisions. What this entails is that agency, or exercising agency, must involve purposively taking actions on the basis of (desirable or anticipated) consequences of such actions (Pescosolido, 1992). Paternoster & Pogarsky (2009, p. 108) explain that making a rational choice is to:

(1) recognize that there are alternatives to attaining some goal, and that one must collect information about these alternatives and what the costs and benefits are to each, (2) consider and compare the costs and benefits of these alternatives, (3) make a decision as to which alternative one is going to choose based on that consideration, and (4) revisit that decision later to see if it could have been improved.

In other words, agency involves rationality which in turn entails making thoughtful and reasoned deliberation in making choices. This is the understanding behind Giddens' (1986) position that

agency and structure can hardly be separated as one continuously influences the other – leading to what can be considered as a causative relationship (New, 1994; Paternoster and Pogarsky, 2009; Lancy, 2012).

In relation to prostitution, the view of women or children as passive victims is negated. The focus is now to understand why the actors act in a particular way and the specific factors behind their actions or decision to act in a manner they do. This world-view cuts across the age and gender dichotomy by acknowledging people's agency as well as structural specificities (Montgomery, 2001; O'Connell Davidson, 2005a; Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009; Doezema, 2010; Melrose, 2010; Phoenix, 2012). This is particularly important as it addresses some of the weaknesses identified in the other perspectives and opens up a foreclosed space to make sense of (child) prostitution in a way that can address the concerns of Phoenix (Phoenix, 2001, 2002, 2012), Montgomery (Montgomery, 2001a, 2001b, 2007, 2008b, 2009b, 2010), Melrose (2010) and O'Connell Davidson (2005a) who offer argument and empirical evidence that challenge the framing of prostitution as sexual exploitation or victimization exclusively on the basis of age or gender.

Using a structure and agency theoretical approach to prostitution, Phoenix (2002, p. 353), O'Connell Davidson (2005) and Montgomery (2001) open up the need to examine child prostitution within structural, economic, political and ideological contextual specificities that shape involvement in, and experiences of, prostitution for children and young people while acknowledging those involved as active agents. Several studies (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Barnardo's, 2009; Bang *et al.*, 2014) also reveal variations in reasons for

involvement in prostitution, in specific structural conditions of involvement, between and within countries, and across time. This is evident in studies of child prostitution that document filial, indentured or debt-bonded (being sold off to brothels)<sup>8</sup>, runaways in Taiwan (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003), trafficking in the USA (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2010; Bang *et al.*, 2014), the use of drugs in the Nordic countries (Pedersen and Hegna, 2003; Svedin and Priebe, 2007), sex work and sex tourism in India (Chemin and Mbiekop, 2015) and Vietnam (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005). But as a study by Hwang and Bedford (2003) shows, despite some similarities of circumstances and conditions surrounding children's involvement in prostitution, the specific conditions and reasons for joining, continuing, or leaving prostitution, differ widely within and between countries. These variations in pathways into, reasons for and means of involvement, demand alternative ways of understanding and making sense of child prostitution beyond a generalized overview of what constitutes child prostitution that lacks the understandings of those with experiences of involvement as well as the structural conditions in which they engage in prostitution. My argument is that the current evidence-base that draws on children's rights, feminist, and structure-agency perspectives, remains narrow and could be effectively broadened by documenting children and young people's own accounts of prostitution in innovative and creative ways, and understanding the structural factors driving their involvement.

While the structure and agency framework offers a clearer understanding of child prostitution, it is also limited in focus. The few studies that adopt this approach (Montgomery, 2001, 2007;

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<sup>8</sup> Indenturing is defined as the practice where a young child, particularly girls, is sold by her parents to a brothel (or foster parents). The parents receive the payment and the child is treated as it pleases the buyer, including being tortured and forced to have sex even when critically ill (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003). Hwang and Bedford found that this practice is founded on the belief that parents have the absolute rights over their children who in turn are expected to provide for their parents.



Phoenix, 2001; O’Connell Davidson, 2005a), have focused largely on the contexts and structures in which children and young people who are involved in prostitution make decisions and/or the question of whether children and young people can be conceptualized as active agents, in contrast to their conceptualization, within the children’s rights framework, as being incapable of exercising agency to ‘choose’ to engage. But there has been limited attention to how this knowledge can be extended to explain why particular structures lead children and young people to make particular decisions, or to the impact those particular structures and particular decisions can have on children and young people in general.

So far, the focus of studies has been to challenge the argument that children and young people are passive victims, showing how their involvement in prostitution can be an outcome of exercising agency. Very few studies have shown that children and young people, rather than being passive victims, are active-decision makers who, for different reasons, sell sex. And this has limited our understanding of the relevance of place and time, social, economic, cultural and political factors. It is for this reason that I have looked beyond the frameworks offered by children’s rights perspective, radical and liberal feminist argument, and the structure/agency debate to identify a synthesis of the framework as an alternative approach to understanding children and young people’s involvement in prostitution in Malawi. Since generating a nuanced understanding of child prostitution requires the examination of children and young people’s agency as well as the social, economic, political and cultural structures in which prostitution (the institution of prostitution) occurs. It also requires an examination of the impact of these structural factors and the decisions to engage in prostitution on children and young people. It is for this

reason, while aware of the gaps in each of the theoretical approaches discussed in the previous sections, that I consider the Capability Approach in the section that follows.

### **3.5 The Capability Approach**

The Capability Approach ( Sen 2001, 1999; Nussbaum 2005, 2003, 2001,) expands the framework offered by the structure and agency debate by examining the impact of structural factors, as well as the decisions individuals make, on their well-being. Concerned with human rights and social justice, the approach refers to ‘capabilities’, the freedom of human beings to: “lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value’ (Sen, 1999 p. 18), and ‘functionings’, what people actually do, or are. A core concept of the approach is freedom of choice to lead a valued life and achieve what will contribute to well-being. The approach treats well-being as a matter of individual choice rather than any objective measurement. This chimes with the purpose of this study to understand children and young people’s involvement in prostitution from the perspective of children and young people’s lived experiences.

Nussbaum’s role in the development of the Capability Approach has been instrumental in extending thinking about women’s human rights and capabilities. Unlike Sen who has been reluctant to define specific capabilities, arguing that these will vary and must be a matter of agency and choice, Nussbaum has defined a set of basic capabilities that she sees as central to human life. These are outlined in section 3.5.1 below. The Capability Approach has been employed to explore questions of ‘well-being deprivation of sexually exploited trafficked women’ (Tommaso *et al.*, 2007) and has been discussed in relation to children in a range of settings including education and the street (Biggeri, Ballet and Comim, 2011; Peleg, 2014).

However, to my knowledge, there has been no application of the Capability Approach in considering children's involvement in prostitution.

I considered the Capability Approach as offering a relevant framework for understanding children and young people's involvement in prostitution, and how this can be understood as an issue of social justice beyond the logic of the children's rights perspective that aligns sexual activity with children as sexual abuse. Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2003, 2005) outlines how structural and cultural factors can have a "crippling effect" on people's capabilities (see Table 2 on p. 77 ) especially the capabilities of girls and women in patriarchal societies. She argues that girls may be 'forced', or end up making adaptive decisions in order to 'obey' structural inequalities. Thus, the Capability Approach has useful potential for researchers and policy-makers in making sense of children and young people's involvement in prostitution by documenting why and how they are involved, as well as the impact of involvement on their well-being. The approach extends other perspectives and debates that inform understandings of child prostitution, by exploring the freedoms and 'unfreedoms' of those involved to make choices that will enable them to achieve well-being. In this way, the Capability Approach stood out as having strong potential as a lens through which to make sense of the data and develop a more nuanced understanding of child prostitution.

### **3.5.1 Central Capabilities**

In *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum specifies a set of ten capabilities that she describes as the most important set of basic entitlements without which no society can lay claim to justice since these are central requirements for a life with dignity (Nussbaum 2001, 2003).

Eight of these have strong relevance for this study of children's involvement in prostitution and are shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

**Table 2: Central human capabilities**

<b>Capabilities</b>	<b>Description</b>
Life	Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
Bodily Health	Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
Bodily Integrity	Being secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence and having opportunities for choice in matters of reproduction.
Senses, Imagination, and Thought.	Being able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- think, and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education.</li><li>- use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice.</li><li>- use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise.</li></ul>
Emotions.	Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
Practical Reason	Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
Affiliation	Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

(Source: Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 41–42)

While acknowledging the possible limitations of such a list and accepting that it is open to review, Nussbaum argues that these capabilities set the foundations for examining structural

conditions and their impact on people's lives to determine whether a social phenomenon can be examined and understood through a lens of social justice:

the [ten] capabilities are held to be important for each and every person: each person is treated as an end, and none as a mere adjunct or means to the ends of others. And although in practical terms priorities may have to be set temporarily, the capabilities are understood as both mutually supportive and all of central relevance to social justice. Thus a society that neglects one of them to promote the others has shortchanged its citizens, and there is a failure of justice in the shortchanging" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 40)

She also argues (2003, p. 34) that: "We can only have an adequate theory of gender justice, and of social justice more generally, if we are willing to make claims about fundamental entitlements that are to some extent independent of the preferences that people happen to have, preferences shaped, often, by unjust background conditions". It is therefore important to explore why some people sharing similar circumstances engage in prostitution while others do not.

Unlike the three perspectives considered earlier in this chapter: children's rights, feminism and structure and agency, the Capability Approach "is not strongly linked to one particular cultural and historical tradition, as the language of rights is believed to be [because it] enables us to bypass this [because of its focus to] speak simply of what people are actually able to do and to be" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 39).

The Capability Approach also challenges an over-emphasis on structural inequalities that give rise to exploitation rationalized on the basis of cultural relativity (Nussbaum, 2005). The Capability Approach, I argue, may offer a different way of making sense of children and young

people's involvement in prostitution without reference to an age dichotomy that renders children incapable of agency and free choice. It is helpful in paying attention to gender and to structural conditions and how they may shape freedoms (and unfreedoms) to exercise choice in the matter of achieving well-being.

One final potential of the capability approach in this study which aims to build an empirical evidence base to shape policy and practice, is that the approach opens a new space for making sense of a social problem: children and young people's involvement in prostitution, and its impact on people's lives, in such a way as to identify ways of improving the well-being of children and young people. In this way, I examine how child prostitution can be theorized and how the experience of engaging in prostitution can be understood with reference to the capability approach.

### **3.5.2 Critiques of the Capability Approach & Rationale for a Multi-Dimensional Approach to Analysis**

The capability approach is however considered as a western model, subscribing to development and social justice as other western approaches in terms of what constitutes development, freedoms, and capabilities (Jaggar, 2006). The approach is seen to view the world and human functioning through a Western lens (formulated and designed by theorists) inspired by Western ideologies that subscribe to individualist liberal ideas of what constitutes development and well-being. Some commentators have suggested that it is paternalistic for middleclass Western philosophers to determine capabilities for other cultures (Stewart, 2001, p.1192; Clark, 2002; Qizilbash, 2011).

While questioning Sen's initial framework of the capability approach (without a list of capabilities), Dean (2009) argues that the capability approach centers on Western liberal-individualist underpinnings of human-being while paying little attention to structural factors including power inequalities. He argues: ( p. 267):

In the space of capabilities, the individual is one step removed; she is objectively distanced from the relations of power within which her identity and her life chances must be constituted. Within the space of capabilities there are three major issues which the individual cannot readily see and which are seldom clearly discussed. First, and in any event, human beings cannot be free from their dependency upon other human beings. Second and third, under capitalist social relations of production, individuals can be free neither from hegemonic controls over their participation in the public realm, nor from the direct or indirect consequences of the exploitation of human labour"

Dean is of the view that the approach is more concerned with what the individual can achieve to live a life they value. However, as I have argued under section 3.4 (p. 68); and as is widely acknowledged by both Sen and Nussbaum in their respective writings, structure and individual agency are interconnected. The capability approach focuses on how structures offer or constrain opportunities to a community of people (e.g. on the basis of gender, in Nussbaum's core focus) to lead (or choose which decisions to take in leading) a life they value. Thus, the capability approach acknowledges that individuals/a community of people or opportunities available to them cannot be separated from the structures in which they live as (constrained or not) structures will shape how one leads or does not lead a life they value. This builds into a reciprocal sequence in which actions either suit or shape the structures.



Secondly, it is argued that the capability approach is too broad leading to different, and at times contradictory, interpretations (Nussbaum, 2001b, 2003; Sen, 2004a; Qizilbash, 2011). For example, while Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities attempts to address another common argument against the capability approach – that it lacks a guiding framework and is too broad in practice – it has also been seen as a tool used by 'experts' (Clark, 2005; Sugden, 2006; Dean, 2009) so that the approach is open to manipulation to suit the interests of those experts (Qizilbash, 2011). Clark (2005, p. 6) argues that composing a definitive list of capabilities can be perceived as an endorsement of what constitutes welfare and development according to experts. And Qizilbash (2011, p. 25) believes the approach may be considered 'illiberal' for sticking to what counts in experts' eyes rather than what people actually value.. It is precisely such considerations to which Sen (2004a) refers in explaining his decision against developing a list of central capabilities:

insisting on predetermined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning...To have such a fixed list, emanating entirely from pure theory, is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why... public discussion and reasoning can lead to a better understanding of the role, reach and significance of particular capabilities (Sen, 2004a, p. 77-81)

Sen and Nussbaum therefore offer visibly different approaches to the application of capabilities. Nonetheless, concerns that the capability approach is prone to manipulation are important in this study in which I focus on participants' accounts of their own lives. Dean's argument that the capability approach reflects liberalist-individualism mirrors critiques of the children's rights

approach in adopting a Western notion of childhood. And this opens a space to explore power relations in communities where social cohesion and deeply embedded cultural practices are highly valued and key to people's day-to-day being. In this thesis, I explore structure and agency, examining both social conditions and the manner in which individuals act in the context of such structural factors.

Dean also acknowledges that Nussbaum's inclusion of public participation as one of the central capabilities serves as an effort to overcome the gap created by focusing on individual capabilities without looking at structural factors that inform or impinge on those capabilities. And as Qizilbash argues, an important element of the capability approach that avoids reliance on experts 'accounts', is the importance it places on engagement with people in documenting and voicing their own experiences of, and aspirations for, lives they value and capabilities, available or not, that would enable them to choose and lead such a life (Qizilbash, 2011). In advocating for the use of more participatory approaches, Sen (2004b) also acknowledges that development emerges from diverse circumstances and structural factors. He argues that understandings of individuals' capabilities to lead the lives they value can be understood by engaging with them while also referencing their contextual settings and how these impede or foster human capabilities. In this manner, use of the capability approach requires acknowledgment both that individuals are active social actors and that structural factors serve to enhance or constrain opportunities for individuals to lead the lives they value.

In this study of child prostitution, I strive to avoid the risk of expert driven data collection and analysis. My strategy has been to acknowledge the strengths and limitations of each of the

theoretical frameworks reviewed to develop a rich and nuanced understanding of child prostitution. In this way, I explore the potential for new ways of theorizing child prostitution that foreground children's and young women's own experiences and understandings of their involvement in prostitution by synthesising these theories. Participants are both placed at the centre of, and play central roles in, this research. Close attention is paid both to individual participants as active agents and to the roles of contextual structures in shaping their decisions by enabling or constraining their freedom to identify, and take, opportunities to pursue lives they value. As argued by Clark (2002, p. 78), it is important to take into account any genuinely rational assessment of local values that local people see fit to provide. In this way, the capability approach is used as a vehicle for developing understanding rather than generating empirical data that disregard the voices of concerned actors. As Clark (2002) argues, the importance [of the capability approach] lies in its emphasis on direct involvement with participants in dialogue to document stories, experiences to understand how their capabilities are enhanced or constrained in the face of particular structural conditions. Indeed, Sen (1999, p. 31-32) argued that [ordinary] people must be directly involved and they, not local elites (political or religious) or cultural experts (domestic or foreign), must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what capabilities should be identified (Sen, 1999, pp.31-2). Clark (2005, p. 5) notes that the capability approach is significant in its ability to strengthen, as well as be broadened, by other theories that acknowledge that individuals have values and goals that transcend and sometimes even conflict with their personal well-being.

As Sen (1999, 2005) himself noted, it is important to acknowledge that capability approach cannot serve as a complete theory of social justice or development without consideration of other

theories and approaches, such as those discussed in earlier sections. And when considered alongside other theories, the capability approach provides a further lens through which to view human heterogeneity and diversity (Clark, 2005, p. 5), something that is lacking in the children's rights and feminist approaches. The capability approach also broadens and draws "attention to group disparities (such as those based on gender, race, class, caste or age) while embracing human agency and participation (by emphasising the role of practical reason, deliberative democracy and public action in forging goals, making choices and influencing policy), and acknowledging that different people, cultures and societies may have different values and aspirations" (Clark, 2005, p. 5). As Clark argues, one of the chief strengths of the capability approach lies in its flexibility and internal pluralism, allowing researchers to develop and apply it in different ways.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has offered a critical analysis of three key theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand or explain child prostitution: children's rights, radical and liberal feminism, and structure/agency. Acknowledging the strengths of each I also identify their limitations for developing a nuanced understanding of children and young people's involvement in prostitution, and argue the possibilities of the Capability Approach in moving forward theoretical thinking about child prostitution. In the chapter that follows, I outline the qualitative methodology, participatory approach and research design of the empirical study. I describe and reflect on the use of participatory techniques, on the wider fieldwork process and on ethical considerations and ethical dilemmas that arose, before outlining the approach to data analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the research design and methodology employed to explore the research questions:

- RQ1 How and why do children and young people in Malawi engage in prostitution?
- RQ2 How do children and young people understand their involvement in prostitution?
- RQ3 How do social, economic, political and cultural issues influence and shape (children and young people's) involvement including the routes into, continued involvement in and/or routes out of prostitution?

The chapter is divided into five main sections. Following this introduction, I outline the methodological framework that shaped the fieldwork (4.2). I particularly focus on the rationale for adopting a qualitative research methodology and a participatory research approach. This is followed by a presentation of the research design (in Section 4.3). I focus on how I identified and negotiated with participants as well as how I introduced the research and obtained informed consent among a range of measures to address ethical issues, which are threaded through the chapter. An important issue here is how I worked together with female research assistants, recognizing the limitations and challenges of researching child prostitution as a man. The next section (4.4) presents the data collection methods that participants chose to document their stories of involvement in prostitution. Reflection on the strengths and challenges in using these methods, and on ethical issues and practical dilemmas that I encountered follow in section 4.5. I draw on one particular dilemma to illustrate the challenges of fieldwork in this study and show

how I worked jointly with the participants to address the situation. In section 4.6 I discuss the process of data analysis before summarising the chapter.

## **4.2 Qualitative Methodology and a Participatory Research Framework**

This study is grounded in a qualitative methodological framework. Jennifer Mason (2007) argues that qualitative research is key in studies that aim to generate rich, depth, nuance, context and multi-dimensional insights into a social phenomenon being examined. Her argument that “[qualitative research] has unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular context” (Mason, 2007, p. 1) captures the rationale behind my decision to engage qualitative research methodology. My study aims to capture and explore participants’ own understandings of why and how they become involved in prostitution as well as extending understanding of the contextual and structural factors associated with child prostitution in Malawi. The research was grounded in a philosophical position that Mason (2007, p. 3) describes as critical ‘interpretivist’. Here I was concerned with how child prostitution, as social phenomenon, is “interpreted, understood, experienced, produced, [and/or] constituted” by the social actors. This necessitated the adoption of a methodology that would enable me to engage with social actors (participants) with lived experiences of child prostitution. As other writers (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2012; Sarantakos, 2012) explain, this methodology centres on people’s own lived realities and perspectives on social phenomena affecting their everyday lives, while also recognising people as active social actors in their own environments. I devised this research to foreground participants’ own accounts of involvement in prostitution as contextualised within the social, economic, political and structural specificities in Malawi. As Mason (2007, p. 1)

argues it is possible to produce “very well founded cross-contextual generalities” as context and explanation are connected.

Aware of the sensitive nature of this research and the importance of emphasising dialogue and participative discussions in documenting participants’ accounts, I adopted a participatory research methodological framework (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Jupp-Kina, 2010; Clark, 2011; Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) and National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), 2012). There is an extensive body of literature (Whyte, 1990; Burkey, 1992; Chambers, 1997, 2002; Minkler, 2000; Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 2004; Khanlou and Peter, 2005; Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Clark, 2010, 2011) about participative knowledge-generating methods. Known by different terms in different disciplines (Park, 1999; Clark, 2011), participatory research can be defined as a systematic, critical and reflective inquiry covering a wide variety of dialogical approaches grounded in people’s shared experiences, struggles and local knowledge with a view to improving their situations and a commitment to social justice (Burkey, 1992; Minkler, 2000; Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 2004; Khanlou and Peter, 2005; Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) and National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), 2012).

As argued by Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007, p. 13), participatory research is founded on an ontology that “human beings are dynamic agents capable of reflexivity and self-change, and an epistemology that accommodates the reflexive capacities of human beings within the research process”. While challenging scientific positivism, Kindon, Pain and Kesby demonstrate that

participatory research treats research participants as competent and reflexive agents capable of generating multiple and valid constructions and interpretations of their personal experiences. In this way it is possible to gain valid insights into subjective realms through direct and active negotiation, engagement and interaction with the people concerned while allowing the researcher to continuously reflect on the research process and interaction with the participants (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Jupp-Kina, 2010, 2012b; Atkinson, 2013).

Another advantage of participatory research lies in its potential to effect trust and community empowerment (Burkey, 1992; Chambers, 1997; Park, 1999; Hampshire, Hills and Iqbal, 2005; Khanlou and Peter, 2005; Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). While defining empowerment as “an effect of a form of governance that enables people to forge a common will and work with others via negotiation and persuasion”, Kesby, Kindon and Pain (2007, p. 22) argue that this enables knowledge to be generated through ‘negotiated spaces’ based on a commitment to sharing power so that the knowledge generated is of direct relevance and benefit to the participants and communities involved. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire initiated a community based approach under which he highlighted the value of sharing and/or negotiating power in the process of knowledge generation to effect change rather than treating social actors as passive beings unaware of reciprocal relationships between their social world and the actor’s role in it. It was particularly important for me to adopt this approach in the context of my role as a male researcher attempting to further understandings of child prostitution which, as we shall see later, involved engagement with girls and young women in a cultural context strongly influenced by traditional structures of male power and dominance.



Participatory dimension of this research makes it more relevant for action-oriented research in the Global South (Park, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). The emphasis in the Global South is on collective and negotiated action embraced within the notion of (power) sharing, participative and dialogical research (Kamlongera, 1982, 2005; Burkey, 1992; Chambers, 1997; Park, 1999; Porter, Townsend and Hampshire, 2012). Recent studies (Porter *et al.*, 2010) conducted in Malawi attest to the familiarity of this approach in the Global South and it was indeed familiar to the first NGO through which I was able to identify prospective participants. As such, my decision to adopt a participatory research strategy was both ideologically and practically suitable as it was participant-centred while facilitating an appropriate environment in which sensitive topics could be discussed (Boyden, 2000; Montgomery, 2007; Croghan *et al.*, 2008; Ennew, 2008; Beazley *et al.*, 2009; Alderson, 2012; Ansell *et al.*, 2012).

Participatory research is not without its critics and Cooke *et al.* (2001) argue that the very notion of participation is ambiguous and can be easily manipulated by research practitioners. But, as I show in the sections that follow, the effectiveness of participatory research lies in the participants' full awareness of the research aims and actively engaging and leading in data collection activities to ensure that knowledge is an outcome of on-going negotiation. This plays a significant role in sharing power, building trust and confidence through democratic and voluntary participation (Kendon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). In this regard, through a participatory research approach, I was able to engage with participants in a reflexive process of interaction. In line with the principles of participatory action research to effect trust, empowerment and social change, the participants further expressed interest to continue engaging with me as an ally in the dissemination of findings particularly to policy makers and practice agency. I have also learned

that some of the participants, having discussed some of the means through which they could seek support from service providers as well as protection from the violence and exploitation that characterises prostitution (discussed in detail in Chapters Five and Six on experiences of involvement), joined a team of sex workers challenging the legality of the criminalization of prostitution supported by funding from a local NGO. They have been successful in this challenge. In the sections that follow I outline the research design and show how I met participants, introduced the research and negotiated their participation.

### **4.3 Research Design**

This section outlines the design for this study, how I identified participants, introduced the research and negotiated participation ensuring that the research process adhered to ethical principles to ensure transparency, respecting the rights and dignity of participants, minimising risks, ensuring voluntary participation and informed consent throughout. The research was approved by Durham University Ethics Committee and Malawi's National Commission for Science and Technology's Committee on Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Table 3 (p.91) shows an outline of the research design.

**Table 3: Research design outline**

Research design		
DISTRICT Y	DISTRICTS Y AND X	DISTRICT X
Sample accessed through NGO Y HIV prevention programmes	Government Department of Social Welfare	Sample accessed through NGO X HIV prevention programmes
Supported by recruited research assistant		Supported by NGO fieldworker
Sample 4 young women 20-29	Sample 2 DSW officers 1 field facilitator	Sample 15 young women and girls 12-34 years; 2 women (35 & 39 years)
Participatory methods  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem tree</li> <li>• Photovoice</li> <li>• Character drawing</li> <li>• Narrative interviews</li> </ul>	Semi-structured interviews	Participatory methods  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem tree</li> <li>• Paper cuttings</li> <li>• Character drawing</li> <li>• Storyboard</li> <li>• Photovoice</li> <li>• Ranking</li> <li>• Narrative interviews</li> </ul>
Note: narrative interviews drew on visual representations (problem tree/character drawing) prepared by each participant that were used to generate whole stories.		

#### 4.3.1 Accessing Participants

Researching in the sensitive field of child prostitution and aware of various challenges faced by other researchers (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Montgomery, 2007) in accessing participants, I relied on the support of two national NGOs (NGO X and NGO Y) in Southern Malawi that primarily run HIV prevention initiatives. Through these programmes, the NGOs work with young women

who are involved in prostitution. Both NGOs had welcomed my research proposal and agreed to convey information about the study and invite participation. Their collaboration was driven by their shared interest in the research questions and I agreed to share the research findings to inform their own interventions in working with children and young women at risk of HIV/AIDS.

I had originally planned to conduct this study only with one NGO, but met significant challenges accessing participants. This was in part due to the change of focus of the NGO's work between agreeing to collaborate and my arrival to undertake fieldwork.

While using age as a framework to guide me in drawing together a group of participants my initial plan was to attract adolescents aged between 14 and 18 years old who had experiences of prostitution that were being supported by the NGOs with whom I was collaborating. There is evidence (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Abdella, Hool and Tadesse, 2006; Svedin and Priebe, 2007) that some children involved in prostitution have engaged at puberty or even earlier, between the ages of 10 and 14. Other evidence suggests that children involved in prostitution are more likely to be aged between 15 and 17 (Melrose, 2013). On this basis, I decided that 14 would be an appropriate age for inclusion in the study. Although in Malawi those aged between 14 and 35 are regarded as young persons (Malawi Government 2013), I was conscious that Malawi had ratified the UNCRC which could serve as an indication of the country's commitment to safeguarding against various forms of exploitation including prostitution of anyone below the age of 18.

When I was negotiating collaboration with the NGOs, I was assured that they were working with children within the 14-18 year age group who had experiences of prostitution. However, it was only when I embarked on my fieldwork that I realised that neither of the NGOs was working with children. One NGO had previously worked with street children including those rescued from prostitution. But it no longer had such programmes. However, both NGOs were working with young sex workers on HIV/AIDS initiatives intended to encourage safe sexual practices. And, in initial discussions with young women supported by the two NGOs it became clear that the majority had first engaged in prostitution as children. This led me to adapt the focus of the research to explore the links between child and adult prostitution. In this way, I adopted a participant-centred approach, refining the focus of my work to the reality of the lives of the participants.

Due to challenges in accessing sufficient participants, only being able to work with four young women through with NGO Y during a first phase of fieldwork (September 2013-January 2014), I sought the support of another NGO. As other researchers (Boyden, 2000; Kirby, 2000; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Montgomery, 2007) have pointed out, it is not easy to access participants in researching child prostitution given its sensitive nature and connotations of illegality. In the second phase of fieldwork (July-November 2014), I was able to work with a further 15 young women and a girl aged 12 (known here as Loni) who was brought to my attention by a participant and friend of Loni's mother who was already participating in the research. Loni had expressed interest in joining in the participatory activities and with her and her mother's additional consent, she joined the research<sup>9</sup>. Collaborating with and accessing participants

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<sup>9</sup> An overview of participants is given in the following chapter.

through these NGOs offered assurance that participants were accessing appropriate courses of psychosocial support to help them achieve some emotional distance from their experiences, hence, finding it easier to talk about such experiences with me in trust, confidence and confidentiality (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Melrose, 2002). But before meeting the participants, I recruited a female research assistant in District Y and worked in close collaboration with one of the NGO's female fieldworkers in District X, for reasons discussed below (see also Appendix 2(a) on p.280).

#### **4.3.2 Involving Female Researchers**

Reflecting on the best possible way of interacting with participants, I was acutely aware that as a male researcher, interaction with female participants raised important ethical issues of unequal power relations and the danger of reinforcing paternalistic hegemonies that could risk excluding participants if not addressed continually throughout the process (Kirby, 2000; Barker and Smith, 2001). I had planned to work closely with the NGOs' fieldworkers who could explain the research and introduce me to the participants. However, NGO Y had just scaled down its activities and did not have fieldworkers. I thus recruited a female research assistant through my University of Malawi networks.

Working with a female research assistant primarily allowed me to ensure that I could address ethical challenges of being a male researcher working with female participants to understand child prostitution. But it also enabled me to meet expectations of cultural appropriateness. I aimed to accord participants with the freedom to decide who they could talk with comfortably (Kirby, 2000). But also wanted to avoid being alone or being seen to be alone with female

participants by other people in the areas where I was conducting my fieldwork. Some researchers (Kirby, 2000; Barker and Smith, 2001; Sultana, 2007) have outlined that this is important to limit possibilities of serious allegations when research involves participants of the opposite sex. The female research assistant arranged meetings with participants and helped in developing trust and openness in working with participants. I found her presence and emotional support significantly helpful and reassuring when difficult choices had to be made. The feeling that I had someone there with me increased my confidence that I was not taking decisions which could endanger participants, the research assistant or, indeed, myself. She was someone who I could confide in regarding my fieldwork worries or concerns, a feeling that Melrose (2002) refers to as the emotional labour pains of fieldwork particularly on sensitive topics. To help ease our respective emotional labour pains of fieldwork, we discussed and shared personal and emotional difficulties and concerns arising after each data collection activity (Ansell et al., 2012).

In addition to enhancing security and emotional support by ensuring that data collection activities in District Y were facilitated in pairs (Melrose, 2002; Sultana, 2007; Ansell *et al.*, 2012), the research assistant's presence also afforded participants the opportunity to discuss issues they were not comfortable to talk about with me on the basis of gender. Not only was she the first person to help ease my anxiety through her physical presence, but she shared her contact details with the participants so that they could contact her should something emerge that required immediate attention. Participants were also assured that if they wanted to keep their discussions with the research assistant confidential, she was not obliged to inform me. All data collection activities were conducted in participants' home, and group discussions mostly carried out at

Luziana's (one of the participants') house. As Nahar and van der Geest (2014) discuss, I experienced this as a sign of trust and of being accepted.

In District X, lack of funding ruled out the possibility of employing another research assistant and the NGO offered the assistance of one of their fieldworkers. She played a similar role to that of the recruited research assistant in District Yin helping me to get to know the participants, build rapport and trust until I was fully accepted by participants. I became aware of being accepted through how actively and openly participants communicated during discussions. As the fieldworker was, at times, busy with her own work, But I did keep her informed of my data collection movements throughout (Montgomery, 2007). She had introduced me to some of the shopkeepers around the area as a student and colleague at NGO X. The NGO is widely known in the area for its HIV/AIDS initiatives. This gave me some form of assurance that I was trusted in the area. Group meetings and interviews with individual participants were conducted at a drop-in centre that was managed by the NGO X and coordinated by two of the participants, known here as Labani and Zani. They became my contact points and I shared my own contact details with them to ease arrangements for meetings.

The fieldworker was considered an insider having grown up in the area and being familiar to participants and to people in the area. Participants regarded her as a peer, and she fondly used the expression: *"ife ma sex worker"* (we, sex workers) without othering the participants which could have created a distance and challenged the manner in which they participated in the study (Navarro and Zeni, 2004; Jensen, 2011). While introducing me to the participants, she explained: *"Pearson uyunso tizimuona ngati sex work chifukwa akufuna kuziwa zomwe timakumana nazo."*



*Ndiye tikamambirana, tiyeni tizikhala omasuka kuti aziwe mvemveme weniweni wamiyoyo yathu monga mwasukuluyake*” (when working with Pearson, let us treat him like a colleague because he is interested to know about our lives. So let’s be open because only through that can he document valid stories our lives/involvement for the study/research). This helped minimise the effects of the differences between us and avoid what Montgomery (2007) describes as ‘scripted accounts’, that tend to arise when participants are not sure of the motives of the researchers or worry of being taken to task by the gatekeepers.

#### **4.3.3 Making Contact, Negotiating Participation & Documenting Consent**

NGO Y arranged for us to meet with our first point of contact, known here as Luziana, among those they were working with. Luziana, who was instrumental in arranging meetings for the NGO with other young women engaged in prostitution, had been informed about the research and, following further discussions with me and the research assistant, arranged a meeting with other prospective participants. During the first meeting the research assistant introduced the research, its purpose and the participatory approach I hoped to adopt. In District X, the fieldworker had agreed to work closely with me. She arranged meetings with prospective participants, introducing the research and explaining clearly that taking part in the study was voluntary. Participants in both areas were assured that they could withdraw at any time without giving any reason and were free to stop discussions at any point if they felt uncomfortable. They were also assured that withdrawing would not affect any support they were accessing from the NGO. The fieldworker was already known by the participants. In setting clear ethical standards of not being alone with participants of the opposite sex, I worked to the principle of not meeting any participant alone.

To keep participants and myself safe, I ensured that I informed the collaborating NGO before and after every meeting with participants. In District X, data collection activities were conducted at a drop-in centre that served as a familiar setting for participants. This helped to build trust and acceptance among participants since making use of the drop-in centre avoided suspicion of outsiders who saw me as being associated with the NGO that was well known in the area for its wider work with the participants (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Montgomery, 2007).

#### **4.3.3.1 Seeking Informed Consent**

In seeking the informed consent of participants, I explained that I would like to record discussions, reassuring them of the measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. These included the use of pseudonyms for people, places and organisations, secure storage of digitally recorded audio and visual data using a password protected computer (two factor authorisation including encryption so that access to data would require decryption using BitLocker, offering further security if the computer were to be stolen). Data was also stored on Drop Box, protected by a different password, to ensure that I would not lose data in the event of the lap top being stolen or damaged.

Before meeting prospective participants, I learned that a majority of the prospective participants could neither read nor write. In addition to providing verbal information and audio recording consent I also took care to ensure that participants knew how they could access information, including feedback, through the collaboration of the NGOs and key participants such as Luziana, who were able to read.

Accessing participants through the two NGOs gave me a sense of assurance that the participants already had access to support from NGO workers who were aware of their involvement in prostitution. But thinking specifically of any potential consequences of sharing details of their lives, which I anticipated may include distressing experiences, I reinforced information about the availability of a free and confidential psychosocial support service already used by the two NGOs.

After the first meetings participants were invited to consider if they wanted to participate further in the research and I explained that I would need to document evidence they had given their consent. In most cases consent was given verbally and audio recorded, and the question of consent was revisited throughout the research (Kindon, Pain and Kesby 2007) stressing the participants' right to withdraw at any stage of the research; and seeking consent for each data collection exercise. All conversation and discussion was in Chichewa, used proficiently by all participants.

Participants were compensated for their time and in recognition of their contributions to the research with *ndiwo*, food for their families, as well as drinks and snacks during meetings or, on rare occasions, sufficient money K500-K1000 (£0.5-£1) to purchase a drink and a snack. I was advised by the NGOs about appropriate forms of recognition. While my aim was to be consistent with the practices of the NGOs in this sense, I had limited access to resources and in introductory meetings with participants in District X, the fieldworker explained: *Mswahala uja ife timapereka, Pearson sakwanisa ngakhale nthawi zina zizitheka koma si masiku onse si nanga*

*mzathuyu ndi mwana wasukulu*, signifying that I was a student and not earning so I would not be able to match the NGO arrangements on all occasions. This was important because it reinforced that participation was voluntary and that they were not being paid to take part in the study per se.

#### **4.3.3.2 Choosing Venues**

In District X, the plan was to conduct all data collection activities, including individual interviews, at the drop-in centre set up by the NGO in the area where participants met regularly. The centre was managed and coordinated by two participants one of whom lived only yards away. In the case of individual interviews the agreed arrangement was that she would give us the keys to the center and remain within calling distance throughout the interview. Maintaining sufficient privacy to ensure confidentiality, and sufficient ‘openness’ to minimise any risk to participants or me required careful and conscious balancing.

In District Y, Luziana offered to host group discussions at her house while individual interviews were held in participants’ homes. In these four cases, the research assistant attended the interviews with me. Having participated in group activities with us already, the participants felt comfortable to talk with both of us present. This arrangement enabled me to gain experience in narrative interviewing. In District X where the female fieldworker supporting the research process was not always available, I undertook the interviews myself, but only after gaining the trust and confidence of participants in group activities, and always with another person close by.

After the introductory meetings, further meetings were arranged to introduce potential data collection activities and methods. This allowed for discussion, for further building of rapport and

trust, and provided an opportunity to discuss the ways in which participants wished to work with each other, and ways in which the views of all participants could be respected by all other participants. Chambers (2002) details this as one of the first stages to avoid conflicts that may arise during participatory activities. The research assistant in (District Y) and fieldworker in (District X) also underlined the principles of my own involvement, explaining that I would not expect to meet alone with any participant and that I would let the NGO know of any meetings both before and after they took place. While participants accepted that this was to keep both them and me safe they laughed, indicating they understood the potential risks of meeting alone.

Despite feeling comfortable with the arrangements for data collection activities, decisions about appropriate locations required a careful balance between positive principles of trust and acceptance, and risks associated with assuming acceptance by the local community as well as participants. This is a question to which I return later in the chapter where I describe an incident that threatened my own safety and the safety of the participants.

The choice of venue for holding discussions with participants, both in groups, and later for narrative interviews, posed some challenges. I needed to balance the needs and preferences of the participants, taking into account the reality of their lives, including times of engaging with clients in order to earn money, with the need to ensure that these preferences would not pose risks for them, or for me. As (Melrose, 2002; Sultana, 2007; Williams, Binagwaho and Betancourt, 2012) argue, encouraging participants to choose the most convenient location/s for group meetings and individual interviews can help them to become comfortable with the research process more

quickly as they are already familiar with their surroundings and this is thought to enable greater openness in storytelling.

On two occasions, interviews were held at participants' homes. For my own support and safety, I informed the fieldworker of these situations and, as I had explained to all the participants, I let each NGO know of arrangements for data collection on a continuing basis. On the first occasion, the participant, known as Babani, had a visitor but did not want to cancel the interview that had been arranged earlier and asked if the interview could be conducted at her house. I was concerned that if I refused, my decision could have been interpreted that I did not appreciate her involvement. So, the interview took place outside the house and Babani's visitor remained inside with a relative. Babani herself suggested this arrangement in order to have a private space:

*“nditha kumachita manyazi enawo akamva zomwe ndikunena” (I will be shy to talk openly with the presence of my guest and relative).* As well as assuring me that Babani was giving fully informed consent to the interview, it also gave me confidence in the validity of her story, being willing to share details that were not easy to share openly (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Morse *et al.*, 2008).

The second occasion was with Diami. I had already carried out the first interview with her at the drop-in centre. But she said she also wanted to give me some of the visual sketches she was making once she completed them. Her cousin Jobani was with her at her house when I went to collect the sketches. I had about half an hour of narrative interview as she explained to me what she had sketched and why. Even though we sat outside on the veranda, Jobani, who was inside the house, was able to listen and would jokingly make comments on some of the things Diami

was saying about the sketches. Diami did not appear to mind that Jobani could hear her and despite my initial concerns, felt it was more important to respect the right of participants to choose where to be interviewed.

I had 4 meetings with Loni. The meetings were held separately from other participants. All meetings were held at the centre and Labani and Loni's mum were always nearby in all occasions but could not hear what we were discussing. The first meeting involved seeking her consent to take part in the study. The second meeting involved introducing the methods. She chose the character drawing in telling her story of involvement shared with me during the last two of the four meetings I had with her.

#### **4.3.3.4 Choosing Methods**

With the support of the research assistant in District Y and fieldworker in District X, subsequent meetings focused on potential data collection methods. Participants were at liberty to choose which methods they were comfortable to use. It was while introducing these methods that I was able to gain further trust and acceptability (Pain, (2012) as rapport was built, communication facilitated, knowledge and reflections shared. The methods chosen by participants and displayed in Table 3 (p. 91) are further discussed in the following section.

#### **4.4 Data Collection Methods and Techniques**

Offering a flexible research design (Robson, 2011), participatory research accommodates multiple data collection methods to capture diverse expressions and participants' own accounts, enhancing richness and validity by addressing gaps that emerge as well as increasing validity

through the use of different methods and continued discussions (Mason, 2005, 2006; Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Morse *et al.*, 2008; Clark, 2010; Ansell *et al.*, 2012).

Since prostitution is a highly moralised subject in Malawi with those selling sex often labelled as sinners, or wicked, it was important that the specific methods of data collection should enable participants to share and discuss their experiences of involvement openly and comfortably (Boyden, 2000; Clark, 2011) avoiding any sense of shame (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). I devised a set of possible data collection methods to enable participants to share their personal experiences in a manner that was participatory and friendly. These were discussed in initial meetings and the participants chose the methods they preferred. These included photos taken by participants themselves (Wang, 1999; Croghan *et al.*, 2008), character drawing sketches (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; McCormack, 2004) drawn by participants, and problem trees (Anyaeibunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 2004). Other techniques included 'paper cutting' that allowed participants to provide biographical information about themselves in a group setting but without revealing sensitive individual data to each other; and a ranking exercise that generated issues that were of significant concern to the participants.

These techniques, explained in more detail below, complemented by group discussions and individual narrative interviews (Freeman, 2006; Chase, 2011, 2011), were designed to foreground participants' own accounts and interpretations of their involvement and personal experiences of prostitution in order to explore and generate a meaningful understanding of child prostitution (Patton, 2002; Mason, 2005, 2007; Bryman, 2012; Sarantakos, 2012). Often referred to as triangulation in social research (Greener, 2011; Robson, 2011; Bryman, 2012), use of



different methods has been challenged on the basis that different methods reflect different perspectives of the phenomenon and generate different data or require different research questions (Richardson and St Pierre, 2008). However, the advantage of multiple techniques in this research lay in creating a platform for active involvement, enhancing participants' confidence and sense of comfort to talk about their life stories without sense of shame or feeling judged. Montgomery (2007) and Rubenson *et al.* (2005) also demonstrate that use of participative and multiple methods can enhance credibility of data particularly when gatekeepers are used in recruiting participants. I used methods that actively stimulated participants to remain interested in the discussions and engage with me; elicit personal and shared [experiences] as well as conflicting interpretations; detailed insight into social, economic and structural factors shaping involvement; as well as initiating and facilitating participatory discussions (Ansell *et al.*, 2012).

Methods used to generate information for group discussion did not follow a strict linear order and while each discussion focused on a particular form of data, new discussions built on earlier discussions helping to develop richer understanding, identify consistent patterns, inconsistencies in stories and exceptional experiences.

#### **4.4.1 Photovoice**



**Photo 1: Main road in District Y**

Iviana (*participant who took the photo*): *Kawirikawiri timakonda kupita kumseu ndi malo oti tikakumana ndi amuna.*

(We often go to places where we are likely to meet clients...This is a market place along the M1 road).

Photovoice was one of the main tools data collection tools that proved popular among participants. This method involved participants taking photos which were used to discuss involvement in prostitution (Croghan *et al.*, 2008; Pain, 2012). I provided them with digital cameras, and offered technical support in learning to use the cameras and some participants helped their friends to use the cameras effectively.

I asked them to take photos of anything that was important to them or that reminded them of something related to their involvement in prostitution. The data collected through this approach gave an insight on how participants made sense of their involvement. Through the photos (e.g. Photo 1; Photo 2) I was able to gain some insight into the areas where participants spent their daily lives including locations I could not access myself for ethical reasons. The photos were then discussed in groups with participants asking questions or commenting on the photos in relation to their own involvement and experience of prostitution.



**Photo 2: Matiana and her friend at the resthouse where they meet clients. Photo by Iviana.**

Participants took photographs in pairs to provide each other with moral and technical support in taking photos (Melrose, 2002). Participants chose who they wanted to work with usually picking a friend who they already felt comfortable with. This was important as the participants were able to enhance each other's skills in using the cameras and were also able to take some photos that may not have been possible had they been working alone. Despite working in pairs, each participant chose which of their own photos to present to the wider group for discussion. In District X where there were more participants, discussions took place on several occasions to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to share their photos. All participants participated in this exercise in both fieldwork areas.

Cameras were left with participants except when batteries needed to be charged. I explained carefully that they must obtain consent before taking photos of people, explaining to them the purpose of the research and assuring them that any identifying features would be concealed if used in the research report. Most of the photos they took were of themselves or places without people. All photos with people's faces were blurred to conceal their identities as shown in Photo 3 which was taken by Matiana to illustrate where, and how they met clients. All photos were downloaded onto my computer and deleted from the cameras. Group discussions based on photos were held in sight of the computer screen and the only photos that were printed were of individual participants who requested a copy of their own picture for themselves.



**Photo 3: Waiting for clients**

I found this method effective in facilitating dialogue and participation. The participants not only described the places, but related each image to stories of their and experience of prostitution. Participants were able to talk about themselves confidently. As Pain (2012, p. 308) explains, while “Visual methods do not require participants to be articulate or have high levels of literacy, so these methods are often employed with such groups ... it is important that the method is not considered too onerous and that it seems enjoyable to undertake”.

The use of photovoice was not, however, without challenges, each of which has proved a valuable learning point for me. The first challenge lay in the limited number of cameras which limited access for the 16 participants in District X. This was balanced by larger numbers in group discussions where the enthusiasm of the participants resulted in the generation of a large amount of alternative visual data. A second challenge, evident in District Y where there were only four participants, was that participants arguably took ‘too many’ photos. While the number of photos

was not, in itself, a problem, I had initially asked participants in this District to pick three photos they had taken, to illustrate their engagement, locations, and experiences of involvement. However, the participants wanted to view each photo and explain why they had taken it. While this entailed further time, discussion and data generation that would have to be transcribed and analysed, I saw immediately that there were key details arising from the photos which would add richness to the data and discussions. As such, I welcomed with enthusiasm the participants' request to use more photos than I had anticipated. This also had the advantage of not restricting participants (Wang, 1999), leaving them free to talk about their involvement and experience in a manner they chose, picking particular stories they wanted to tell. Restricting them to three photos could have prevented them from talking about certain stories of their experiences or capturing how they made sense of their engagement and experience of involvement in prostitution. Reflecting on the overall use of photovoice, it enabled participants to remain in control of deciding which pictures they wanted to use, what stories they narrated and how they narrated such stories (Wang, 1999; Croghan *et al.*, 2008).

#### **4.4.2 Character Drawing**

Character drawing was used in group discussions where they were generated collectively (e.g. Photo 4<sup>10</sup>), and in individual interviews where they were generated by each individual (Photo 5). In each case the drawings served as a basis for participants to tell their stories and to prompt questions.

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix 4 contains the comments participants made about their lives as documented through sketches they drew such as character drawings.

During group discussions, one participant would volunteer to make the sketch. The participants would then either pick an age or I would ask them to sketch someone of a particular age group. I posed questions that participants could reflect on, such as: how did she end up in prostitution? Or: What would make a person of her age join prostitution? As participants contributed to the discussion the volunteer made notes alongside the picture and other participants would follow up with further questions. The discussions that evolved were unstructured and captured a wide range of information, the social networks of particular participants. Although stories would begin in the third person as was planned, participants often steered the conversation to their own involvement in the course of the discussions. Focussing on a fictional character to start with was effective in enabling participants to make a smooth transition to talking about their own involvement. This approach was particularly important in working with Loni, the youngest participant, aged 12. Loni did not join the group discussions but was keen to be given the opportunity to tell her story. Using a character sketch to start with provided an easier and more sensitive way to hear her story.



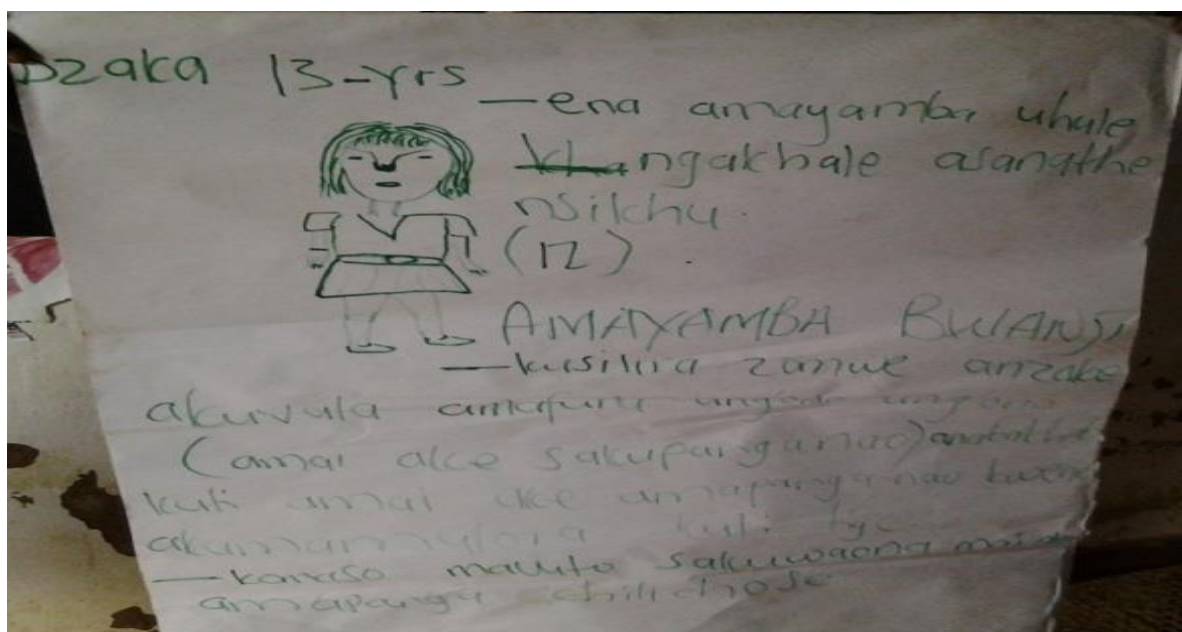


Photo 4: Character drawing to facilitate group discussion

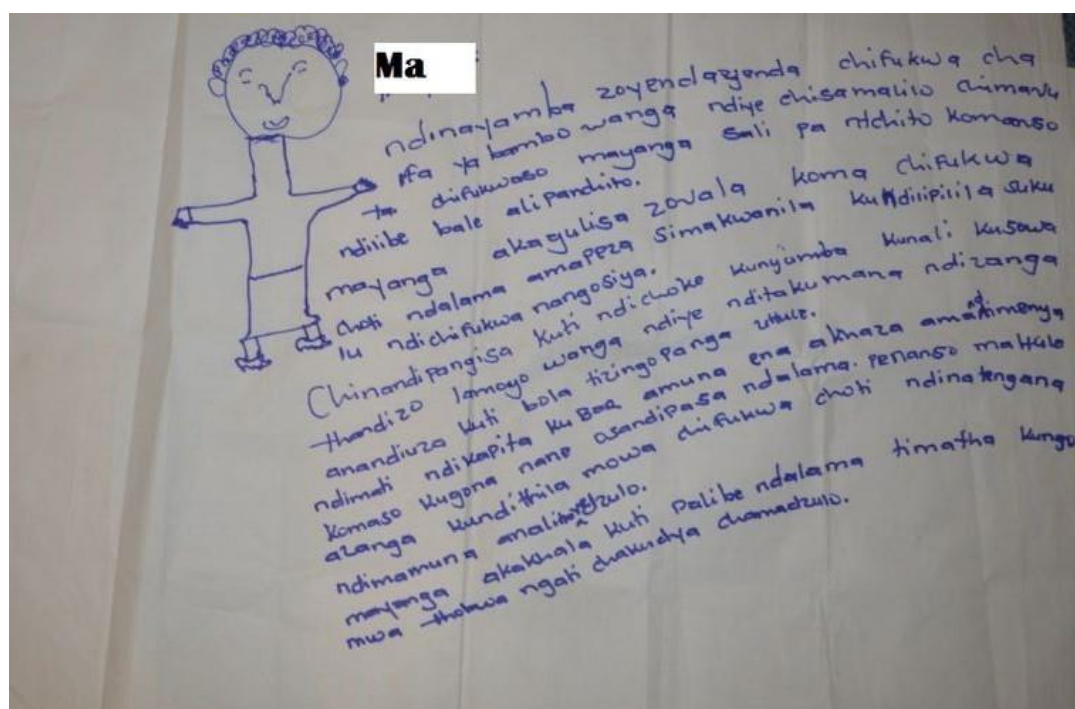


Photo 5: Mazani's character drawing



Group discussion of character drawing was also useful in that it raised my awareness of key themes about participants' involvement in prostitution for follow up in individual interviews.

A further point of interest about the character sketches is that participants in each District decided to role-play some of the sketched characters. An example from District X involved a scene set in one of the popular pubs in the area. Two participants performed the sketches 'ad lib' to show how they met and engaged with clients and to show how they were often treated by them.

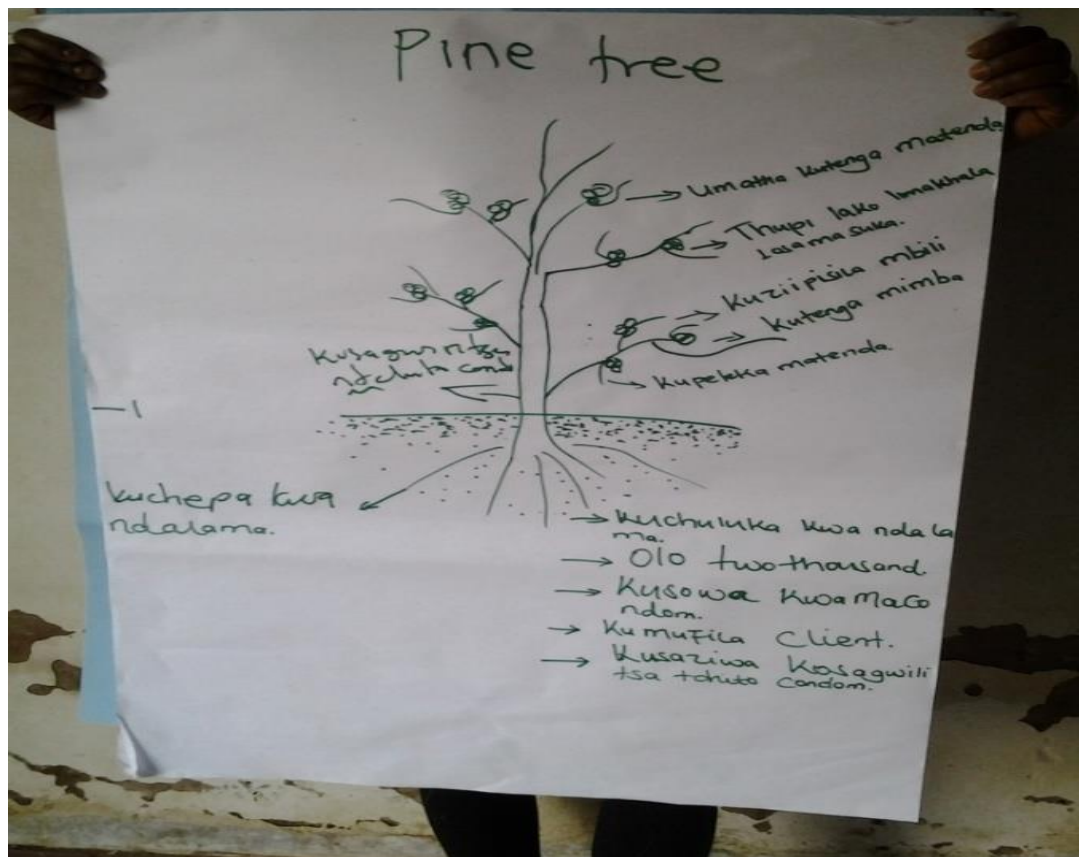
#### **4.4.3 Problem Tree**

The problem tree is commonly used when devising development programmes with community members identifying a social problem (the trunk of the tree) that requires attention, what is thought to be causing the problem (the tree roots), the impact the problem has on people's lives (branches/fruits/leaves) and ways of addressing the problem at each stage from its causes to the impact (See Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 2004 for a detailed explanation of this method to development).

This was an important tool in documenting participants' engagement in prostitution, how they made sense of their own involvement and the impact it had on their lives (e.g. *Photo 6; Photo 7*).

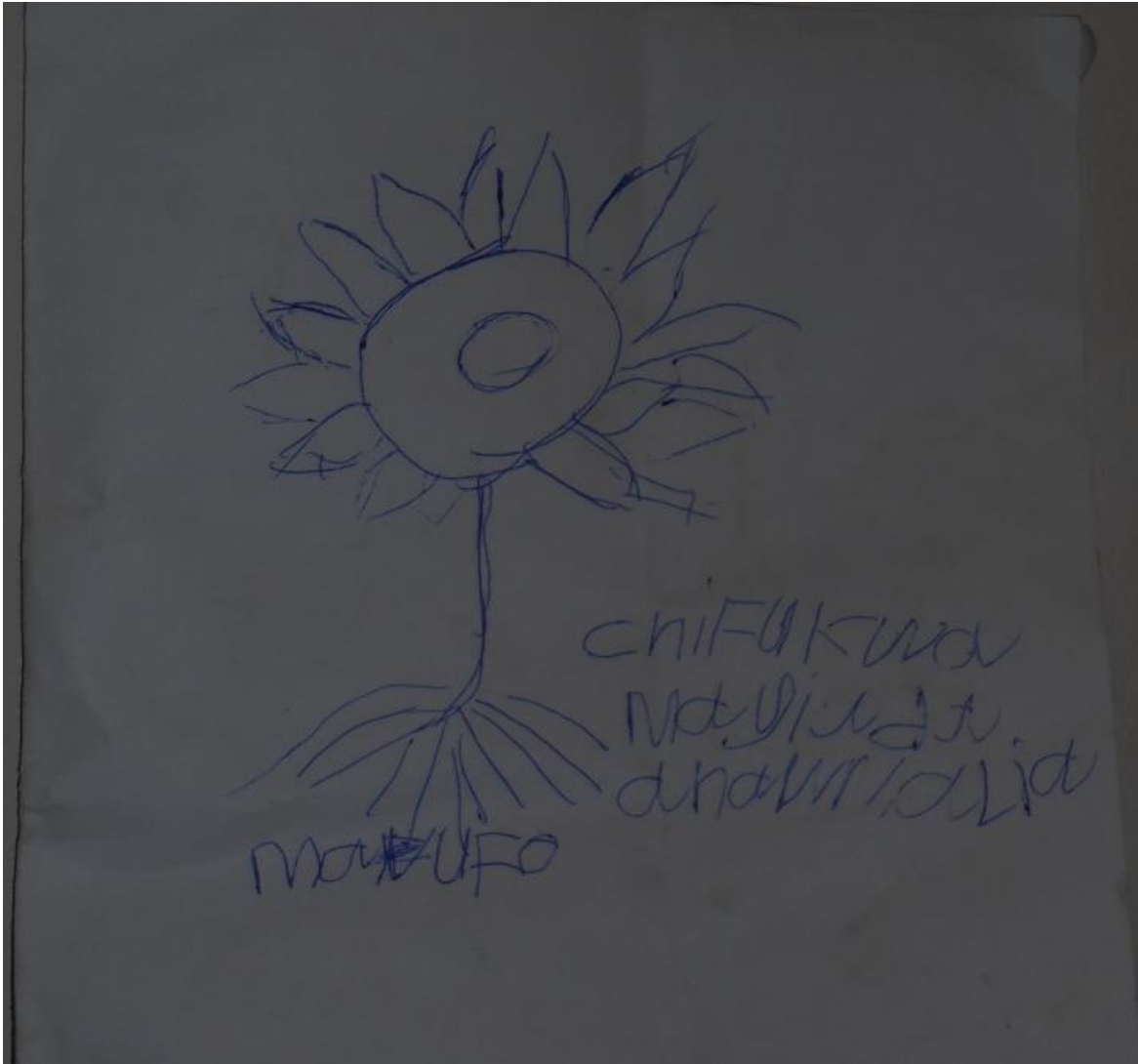
This method was particularly effective in District X where almost all participants' had basic knowledge of how to read and write. But in District Y, I sketched the tree and documented the discussions. While this could be seen as retaining the traditional role of the researcher which could alienate others from actively engaging in the discussions (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), I

used the sketch to facilitate discussions and documented the points raised by the participants. The paper was laid on the ground so that everyone had clear sight of it and I simply acted as a facilitator and note taker, being careful not to influence the direction or content of the contributions.



**Photo 6: Group generated problem tree**

This problem tree (Photo 6) was sketched by a participant in facilitating and documenting the discussions about reasons of involvement and the impact of involvement on participants. One participant is holding it while another was taking a photo. Photo 7 is the same exercise but facilitated with an individual participant.



**Photo 7: Individual problem tree**

Documented two reasons of participant's involvement, poverty and being an orphan

Beyond the generation of rich data in themselves, the problem tree method was helpful in generating questions for the individual narrative interviews about participants' involvement in prostitution. This method was particularly helpful in revealing structural issues that influenced engagement and continuing involvement in prostitution. It was also significant in encouraging participants to reflect on their history of involvement since childhood, and it helped to sharpen my own awareness of structural issues that underpin children and young people's involvement in

prostitution, particularly cultural structures that position females in vulnerable positions with very limited alternative opportunities for survival.

#### 4.4.4 Storyboarding

Storyboards are useful in capturing a sequence of events in a person's life (ref) particularly in circumstances where the content of the story is of an emotional nature. Unlike character drawing, storyboarding involved sketching a sequence of different events to mark the course of involvement in prostitution. Storyboards had been introduced in the group setting but not used in that context. However, two participants chose to use this technique as the basis for their narrative interviews. While the storyboard was also intended to facilitate the story of a third person that could then enable the participant to tell their own story, both participants used storyboards directly to tell their own stories. Photo 8 shows part of Diami's storyboard.



**Photo 8: Example of a storyboard (Diami)**

During the first meeting I had with Diami, she used a character drawing (Photo 8). After the interview, we agreed to meet again and she said she would sketch some of the things she had mentioned using a storyboard. In fact, she made three different storyboards. Some of the information emerging had also been represented in her character drawing, reinforcing and lending validity to her story. It was clear that this story really mattered to Diami and telling it in different ways enhancing claims of credibility (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Bowen, 2008; Morse *et al.*, 2008; Mason, 2010).

#### **4.4.5 Paper Cutting and Ranking**

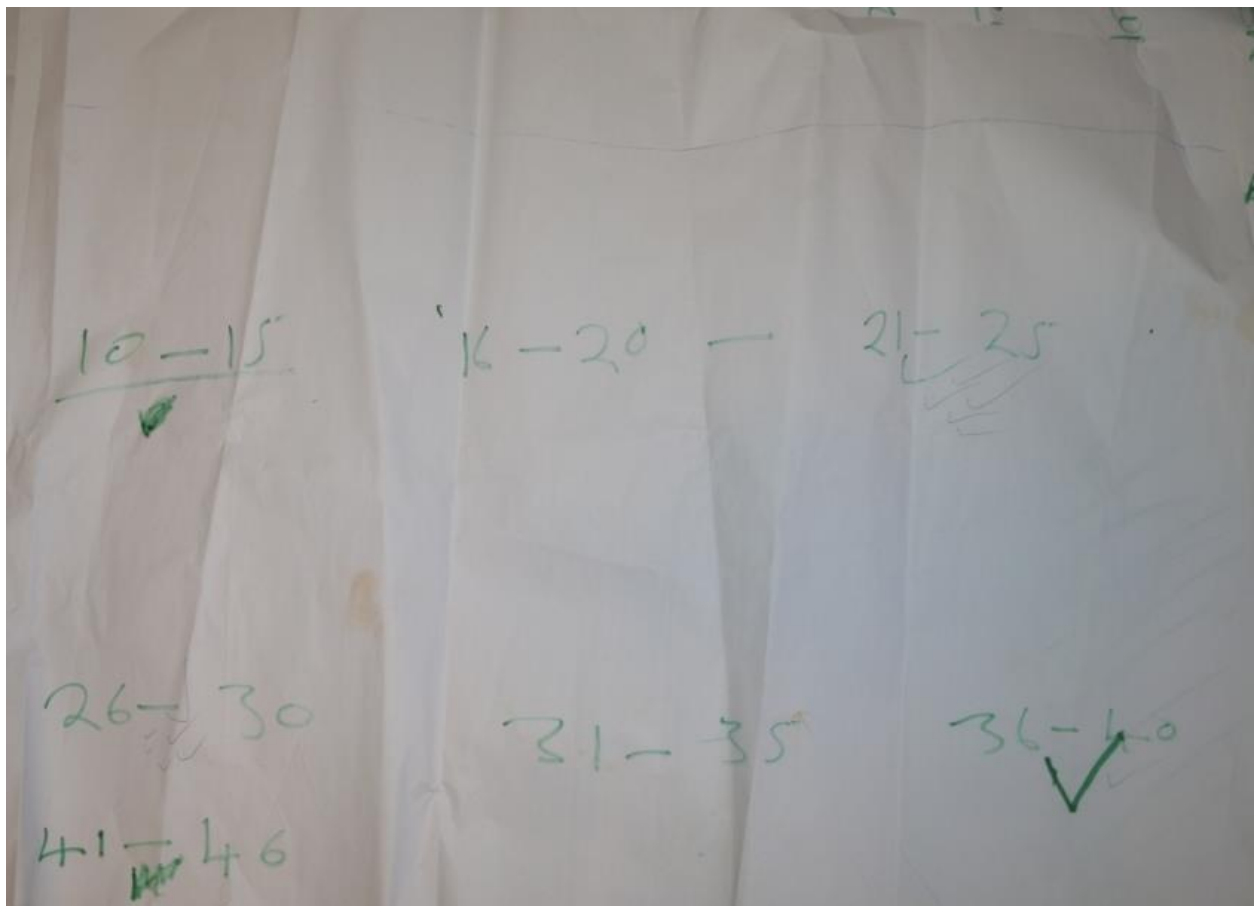
Paper cuttings were used to document basic information that could help build a picture of the whole sample, but, in a way, that did not require direct questioning, and so avoided any individual having to answer questions that might be particularly sensitive for them. Participants were asked to write a basic piece of information on a piece about themselves on a piece of paper, then fold the paper, concealing the information, and placing it in a collective pile so that information could not be traced back to the individual (e.g. Photo 9). One major challenge with this technique was that one participant did not know how to read and write. In line with my ethical commitment to confidentiality and anonymity (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Bryman, 2012), I asked the participant to pick a friend who she trusted to confide in, and to seek her support in contributing her answers. She was able to do this with ease. Learning that this participant was unable to read or write alerted me to the need to avoid asking her to use techniques relying on reading or writing in her individual interview.



**Photo 9: A collection of paper cuttings that participants used**

As I became more accepted by members of the group, and they felt safe to use this method, trusting that their individual information would not reveal their identity, a similar exercise was used to document the participants' age of first involvement in prostitution. All the information collected in this way (age, children, wider family involvement in prostitution, educational attainment) was collated and documented on a flip chart and shared with participants. The field facilitator and I also documented our own details as a way of encouraging participants to actively engage in the fieldwork activities (Kirby, 2000; Jupp-Kina, 2012a).

Through this technique, participants documented their age at time of initial involvement and at time of the research, how long they had been involved, whether other family members had been involved, and how many participants had children (Photo 10). They also shared their HIV status in this anonymous way. This information was not shared among the group and served only to demonstrate the level of health risk associated with prostitution.



**Photo 10: Ranking ages<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>11</sup> Ranking was used to document ages at the time of fieldwork. This exercise also helped compare with what the papercutting exercise had captured



Ranking is considered ideal for capturing differences regarding how participants make sense of their lives (Weller and Romney, 1988). Often used in urban or rural participant appraisals that can be quantified (Stotler, Miller and Shindeldecker, 2012), I employed this exercise to capture how participants' made sense of various elements associated with their involvement. Two ranking exercises were carried out with two groups in District X. The ranking exercises were serendipitous in that arrangements to meet in the drop-in centre were scuppered because the key was not available. The plan had been to meet, in response to participants' requests, to discuss proposals for funding for alternative forms of income generation. As we had to remain outside, we carried out a simple exercise in thinking about issues of particular concern to them. Five issues were raised, these were marked on the ground using a stick and participants placed their stones to convey their sense of the relative importance of the issues.

#### **4.4.6 Narrative Interviews and Group Discussions**

These two techniques are presented together because they represent two channels for eliciting information on the basis of visual representations that were a central element of all participants' collective and individual stories. In other words, visual tools were complemented by narrative interviews and group discussions (McCormack, 2004; Trahar, 2009; Chase, 2011). Through this approach, an elicitation of life-histories with participants during group discussions and individual interviews which enabled participants to talk freely about their involvement without a sense of being restricted to specific time. It also helped to avoid any feeling of being judged in the context of involvement in a stigmatised way of life. Thus, narrative interviews were key in allowing participants to have the freedom to talk about their involvement in the way they wanted, while I was able to seek clarifications and follow up on the stories and issues that were emerging from



previous meetings (Denzin, 2001; McCormack, 2004; Riessman and Speedy, 2007, 2007; Chase, 2011; Bryman, 2012).

In District X, individual interviews took place at a drop-in centre with the exception of two participants as detailed above where I discuss the choice of venues. All interviews were digitally recorded mostly through use of a mobile phone voice recorder. During early meetings, I realised that the digital recorder did not always pick up sound well and the noise cancellation was not very effective. For this reason, I decided to pilot the use of the mobile phone. Almost all participants had mobile phones and were therefore already familiar with them. It has been noted that a recorder can make other participants feel uneasy (Bryman, 2012). I noted a slight improvement with use of the phone as participants hardly glanced at it during discussions. This contrasted with the ongoing distraction when using the recorder. Thus, I was of the view that use of the phone made it easier for participants to focus on what they were saying without minding that they were being recorded.

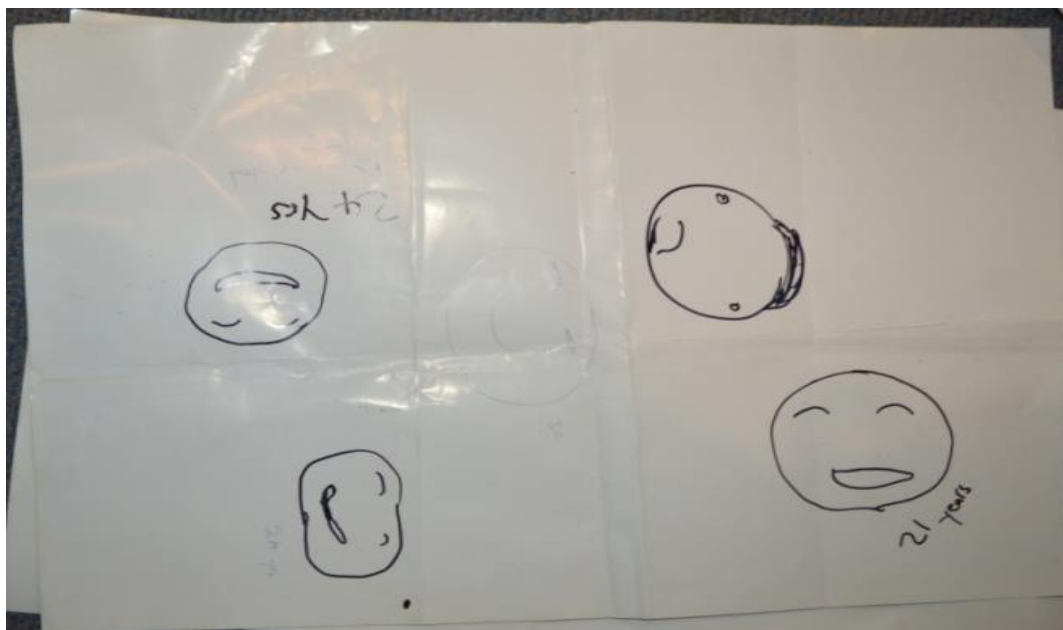
The average length for each interview was 60 minutes, ranging between 40 and 90 minutes. Before recording, I first obtained participants' consent. All participants gave verbal consent that was recorded. During individual meetings, I started by asking each participant which technique they would like to use. As most participants were already familiar with character drawings, problem trees and storyboards I briefly refreshed participants and they were at liberty to pick the method they preferred or were most familiar with. Interviews were then based on inviting each participant to talk about their visual representation. At the end of the interviews some

participants wanted to keep their drawings and in these cases I asked their permission to take photos of the data. All participants agreed and, using my phone, took the photos themselves.

A general overview of the findings generated by each of these methods is presented in Section 5.3 in the Chapter that follows.

#### **4.4.7 Participants' Feedback on Methods**

As a way of ensuring that the methods being used were effective, and also in the spirit of locating as much control of the research process with participants, I regularly sought feedback throughout the data collection period. I did this in a number of ways (e.g. Photo 11; Photo 12). Following sets of group exercises I invited participants to indicate their reaction by marking pre-prepared emoticons indicating happy, neutral and sad faces. This generated overwhelmingly positive responses (e.g. Photo 12). I also asked them to make individual drawings, using similar images that would not be seen by other participants (e.g. Photo 11). With one exception, this also generated positive feedback. On checking with the artist, to try and understand her dissatisfaction she explained that she had enjoyed participating but was unused to drawing and said that her intention was to convey her satisfaction.



**Photo 11: Participants' individual feedback on use of methods<sup>12</sup>**

Describing her satisfaction Zani explained:

*“Tikulowa kwambiri, chipanda njira izi bwenzi tikukamba **patalipatali** eti komanso osamasuka **bwinobwino**. Aliyense akumalongosola zimene iye or wina wake anakumanapo nazo”* (We are able to go **deeper** and **vividly express** ourselves which could have been very unlikely to achieve as we could have felt **uncomfortable** to talk. **Each person** is able to talk about her story and experiences [of involvement in prostitution]).

<sup>12</sup> Emoticons were used to express their feelings on the methods. Participants were asked to draw one of the following: a sad face, normal face and happy face. The paper was folded in a way so no one saw what another person had drawn



**Photo 12: Participants' group feedback on use of methods**

The overall feedback of the data collection methods was positive as seen from Photo 11 and Photo 12 and the quote above. Participants explained they felt were not just talking but were able to reflect and offer in-depth narratives. Throughout my fieldwork, I continued to use methods that I observed were effective in facilitating discussions and, eliciting vivid and reflexive accounts of their lives.

Use of a range of data collection methods has helped enhance the credibility and validity of the findings that are reported in the following chapter. Using methods and techniques that focused on participation helped set an emphasis on participants' own accounts of involvement as well as how they made sense of such involvement; something that I had noted was very thin in contemporary discussions of child prostitution.

#### **4.4.8 Semi-Structured Interviews**

I also carried out two semi-structured interviews with the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) in each of the two districts. These interviews, as explained by a number of scholars (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Mason, 2005; Stroh, 2000; Denzin, 2001), provided me with a valuable space for a general insight on social welfare policy and programmes, in this case on child prostitution. The DSWO in District X asked me to provide questions in advance, and this was followed by a brief meeting to clarify her written answers. This was a useful, if less than helpful learning experience for me in terms of achieving interviews with busy people in official positions (Stroh, 2000). The DSWO in District Y preferred a one-on-one interview which we I carried out at her office lasting about an hour. I also gave her the interview guide in advance when I gave her the information sheet about the research.

Reflecting on these interviews, it was noticeable that while the DSWO in one district likened the issue of child prostitution to that of street children, the other was acutely aware of the problem of trafficking of girls into her area. However, in both Districts, the DSWOs were both of the view that there were no targeted resources or programmes designed to prevent child prostitution or to support those who find themselves involved.

#### **4.5 Reflecting on Fieldwork: Ethics and Keeping Participants Safe**

As I had anticipated, being from Malawi helped me to blend in easily and limit significant suspicion raised by my presence with participants. However, as observed by Barker and Smith (2001), researchers cannot always control how they are viewed or approached by others, and my position as an *insider*, as a Malawian, was challenged in District Y. In this context, I was an outsider in the area, a male (researcher) working with participants of the opposite sex and,

moreover, giving them cameras. After several weeks of meetings with participants, a group of minibus call-boys<sup>13</sup> approached me when, with my research assistant, I was in the course of working with two participants. We had unknowingly been followed to Iviana and Mariana's house.

The call boys demanded to know “*mukumatani ndi mahulewa*” [what do you do with these prostitutes]. I had been identified as an outsider in the area. I had not prepared for this as I thought I had made my *outsiderness* invisible. To avoid confrontation and putting the safety of the participants at risk as well as to ensure anonymity for participants, I assured them that I shared their concerns and I acknowledged that I was indeed not from the area. But I asked if we could ‘talk’ slightly away (*tikambirane pambali*) from the participant's house. I did not want to attract further attention that could have escalated the tension making the situation difficult to control or diffuse. I made use of our common identity as men to say we could understand each other better if it was away from the house since they wanted to talk to me as a fellow male. I said this was important “*kuti timvane ngati amuna tokhatokha* (to understand each other as males). They had initially requested to speak both to me and the female research assistant but I did not want to leave the participants alone nor risk my assistant's safety. She stayed with the participants when we moved slightly away from the house. This created a more neutral position where I could negotiate with the call boys from an equal position.

I explained I was a university student doing *ma-survey*, a term commonly used in Malawi for research, and that I was working with NGO Y. They however demanded to attend the meeting I

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<sup>13</sup> Mini-bus call boys are those who announce the arrival of minibuses and their destinations (R. I. Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2007)

was about to attend to establish if what I had told them was indeed true. This request was against my ethical commitment to keep participants safe, my promise to participants that I would not reveal their identity, nor involve other people in activities without their consent.

It was a scary and very intimidating moment particularly given my knowledge of callboys as often being aggressive and violent. I therefore had to find a way of turning down their request without escalating the situation. I reiterated that I shared their concerns and that I would be just as suspicious as them if they had suddenly appeared in the area where I live. I showed them I was from another location within the same city, and was not a complete stranger to the area. In addition to showing them that I felt I understood their suspicion, I also intended to show them that I was neither surprised nor was a threat to them. This was their location and they were justified in being suspicious of strangers. This situation reminded me of Rose's (1997, p. 317 cited in Barker and Smith, 2001, p. 144) acknowledgement that "the research process is dangerous [as] it demands vigilance, a careful consideration of emerging cases within the field as it is not static nor controllable". While showing that I appreciated the concerns they had raised, I also emphasised to them that I had made a strong commitment to my university, as well as to the participants, that only people who met the focus of the research which was, as they had clearly observed, on young people involved in prostitution (*achinyamata omwe amapanga malonda opita ku mseu*) could be involved. In this way, I explained that it may be possible for them to join the study if they themselves were engaged in prostitution. They accepted that they could not be involved on that basis but continued to insist that I prove my credibility for being in the area and being seen with young prostitutes. I asked them if there was any other way they could think of to possibly establish what I had told them about myself. They suggested that if I insisted on

denying them admission to the meeting, they would call the police. I was cautious about the involvement of the police recalling Montgomery's (2007) experience when she took a young sex worker to hospital for examination resulting in loss of trust she had built with other participants.

It is only in 2016 that the High Court Malawi has decriminalised prostitution; and during the fieldwork period it was a criminal offence to engage in prostitution. I had made a commitment while negotiating with participants to take part in the study that I would not involve the police. Participants had mentioned that they were often detained, ridiculed or asked to sleep with the police officers as a payment to be released. For this reason, I had undertaken to avoid the involvement of the police unless in an exceptional circumstance where only the involvement of the police might prevent the death or injury of a child. I found myself both afraid and eager to sort out the issue and agreed to their demand to involve the police, knowing that I could call on my own police contacts to help. As I had expected, the callboys refused when I suggested calling a police unit within the area, suspecting I could call a friend. I also feared they may not bring genuine officers.

They left saying they would return and we agreed that they would call me from the participants' house. I considered this an opportunity to discuss what had transpired with the participants and discuss possible counter measures if they were to return without officers or people who were not genuine officers. Sultana (2007) considers joint reflection with participants on dilemmas that emerge during fieldwork as helpful and effective in building trust as well as sharing power. I recounted everything that had happened to the participants. We were all shocked and taken by surprise. We agreed to call director of NGO Y but he was not contactable by phone. Upon



discussing with the participants who, like I, feared the callboys would bring unfriendly officers, I suggested using my own social network to call some friends working as police officers. This also served as assurance that they could avoid being detained and targeted since the police officers I would call were close friends from college who could understand and appreciate the research. This was the only practical way that I could minimise the risk of danger to participants in my absence. Various researchers (Ansell et al., 2012; Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007) employing participatory research framework advise the need to always negotiate with the participants the emerging risks. With the agreement, I made with participants, and using my network, I called a personal contact who put me in touch with a trusted colleague at the Regional Police Headquarters. After informing him about my research and what had happened, he gave me a number of a nearby police unit. After calling the unit, officers agreed to come.

One of the call boys came to inform me that the officers they had called were on their way. To limit the risk of these officers knowing the exact location of the participants, I left with the callboy and we met his colleagues waiting with the officers some distance away. Luckily, they were the same officers that I had called from the police unit who also happened to know the call boys. The callboys narrated their side, saying they had suspected I was engaging in, filming, or collecting pornographic materials with participants since I had given them digital cameras. I told the officers who I was and gave them my ethical approval from the Malawi National Commission for Science and Technology's National Health Science Research Committee (which is a government institution that approves studies conducted in Malawi). I also gave them letters from both NGO X and NGO Y. The call boys as well as some of the officers knew of NGO Y's activities in the area as well as the director, and they had a formal contact person in the NGO. I

also explained about my research and the methods I was using including the purpose of the cameras given to the participants.

At this moment, the issue was settled and the five officers assured the callboys that my claims were indeed valid, and my research approved by government (*munthuyu olo boma likumuziwa ndipo wavomerezedwa kupanga survey yakeyi* [even government knows that he is doing this research here. He has been approved too]). I thanked the officers and the call boys for their understanding. But before leaving, the officers advised me to inform the police unit for future visits as a preventive measure to avoid such scenarios. Under the circumstances, I acknowledged this suggestion but was aware that this would not be acceptable to participant and was also mindful of an observation from Montgomery (2007) that involvement of the police in studies involving children in prostitution is likely to be treated with suspicion, affecting the trust and acceptance of participants. I did ask the participants if they would like me to inform the police of my presence in future, but they were adamant they did not want the police involved in issues to do with their lives, and I respected their wishes. Clearly shaken by what had happened, we spent most of the remaining time discussing what had happened.

During group discussions that followed, Luziana and Ruviana suggested confronting the callboys and Martiana and Iviana had identified some of those who had been involved. But I reasoned with them that this could possibly exacerbate the situation since it had already been resolved. We reached a consensus that confrontation could make the callboys become aggressive and lead to situations that could put participants in danger. I shared with the participants that I had been approached by other call boys who held senior positions on the area's call-boys committee. They

had apologised for what had happened and assured me that neither I nor the research assistant would be threatened in the same manner again. This was a relief to us and it also calmed participants who had wanted to confront the callboys.

This experience heightened my awareness of potential problems of this kind. Mindful of advice from researchers (Kendon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Montgomery, 2007; Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) and National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), 2012) that being open with participants is key in negotiating issues that may lead to conflict and in identifying possible solutions, I paid explicit attention to the possibility of threats in undertaking the second stage of fieldwork in District X.

It is evident here that despite taking precautions such as engaging a female research assistant, the callboys had ‘re-imaged’ me as: (i) a man “out of place” (ii) working with women (iii) engaged in prostitution (Barker and Smith, 2001, p. 145).

#### **4.6 Data Analysis: A Multi-Theoretical Approach**

In total I worked with 19 participants and generated the following data: 18 character drawings, 9 problem trees, 194 photos, 2 storyboards, 5 sets of paper-cuttings, 98 audio recordings from discussions, narrative interviews and semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the data was an on-going process. Partial analysis started during my fieldwork through which I started becoming aware of emerging themes and patterns. I carried out a detailed analysis after the fieldwork. I first transcribed all the audio data. To retain accuracy and originality to what the participants’ have said, the first data transcription was done in Chichewa to retain originality. I then translated

the transcripts into English. The transcription and translation did not only increase my familiarisation with the actual data that I collected but also served as a reflexive process on the fieldwork process and some of the key undertakings that occurred while working with participants. With this, I was able to make other reflective notes on the key issues that were particularly raised during those interviews or that I took note of while transcribing and interpreting the data.

After data transcription and interpretation of the audio data, I entered and managed the data analysis through NVivo. This software enabled me to identify codes, further organise and structure key issues that were emerging into patterns across the data. As a result, I developed a word-cloud of the codes and a thematic mind map. I printed out the codes and categories to develop tree-nodes that I related with the mind-map I had developed to further identify dominant connections between the themes. I categorised the thematic issues into dominant categories which pointed towards: a) initial stage of involvement in prostitution; b) the actual reasons of involvement; c) the ways in which they became involved; d) the experiences of involvement e) the ways in which they interpreted and made sense of their involvement; and f) the ways in which they were supported by the social and justice systems; as well as g) the plight of children born to those who are involved in prostitution. Within each category, I added my own interpretation based on empirical observations as well as on theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter Three. I moved back and forth between the audio and visual data that complemented one another, and drew on my field notes in making sense of the data.

Coates and Coates (2006, p. 221) argue that visual data, the stories woven around them and the context in which they are constructed are all fundamental in making sense of the data. The referencing between audio transcripts and visual data further enhanced my familiarisation with the data and minimised any possible misinterpretation of the stories that were generated from each data set. In this way, the continuous reference between data sets emphasises participants' own accounts of their lives and experiences of prostitution as well as the contexts in which their stories (i.e. the actual involvement) had been "created".

#### **4.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined and presented a discussion of the research methodology, design and methods. I explained the rationale for adopting a participatory research approach including visual methods was influenced by the research questions that focus on the exploration of children and young people's own understandings of their engagement and involvement in prostitution. The use of these methods has generated a rich data set, created by children and young people's stories that they willingly shared within a strong and clear ethical framework that held firm under pressure. This has enabled me to generate nuanced understandings of child prostitution that are presented in the following chapters.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: WHY AND HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGE IN PROSTITUTION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Having outlined the methodology and data collection methods in the previous chapter, here I present a general overview of the participants (5.2) before providing an overview of the findings generated from the participatory data collection techniques (5.3). In the remainder of the chapter I foreground the data in order to address the research questions: How and why do children and young people in Malawi engage in prostitution? How do children and young people understand their involvement in prostitution? How do social, economic, political and cultural issues influence and shape children and young people's involvement including their routes into, continued involvement in and/or routes out of prostitution? The chapter is, however, structured in a way that allows us to see the age at which participants became involved in prostitution (5.4); sites of engagement in prostitution (5.5); and the factors associated with engagement (5.6). This provides the basis for chapter 6 which will provide participants' own understandings and interpretations of their involvement and my own critical interpretation of the findings in the light of existing empirical evidence and theoretical argument relating to child prostitution.

### **5.2 An Overview of the Participants**

I worked with 20 young women in Malawi who had experience of involvement in prostitution starting in childhood, in order to generate a critical understanding of child prostitution. Using data collection methods discussed in the previous chapter, I documented their stories of why and

how they became involved; their actual experience of involvement; and how they made sense of their involvement.

Participants were initially identified through two NGOs working with sex workers on HIV prevention initiatives. Through an NGO in District Y, I was able to recruit four participants. And a further 16 participants were identified through an NGO in District X. I used snowball sampling (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Bryman, 2012), with a number of participants being introduced by their friends who were also taking part in the research.

In addition to the 20 participants who continued throughout, other prospective participants showed initial interest but withdrew after attending initial meetings. As participation was voluntary, I made sure that none of the participants, including those who had withdrawn, felt any obligation to attend, something that other researchers (Emmel *et al.*, 2007; Montgomery, 2007) have noted as important especially when gatekeepers are involved in the recruitment process. Table 4 presents the participants who have all been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

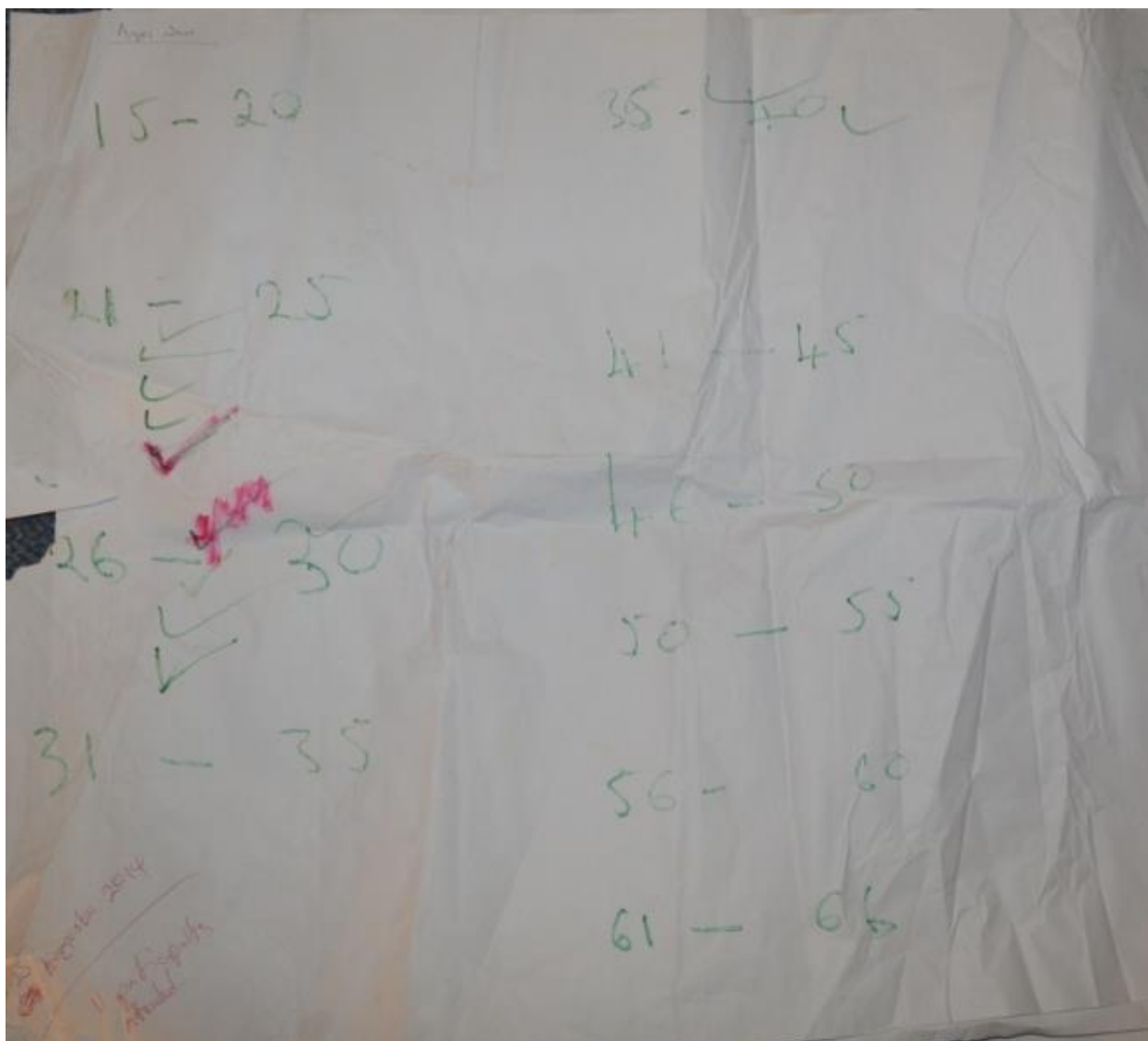
**Table 4: The Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Relationship with other participants</b>	<b>Age of first involvement</b>	<b>Age during fieldwork</b>
Loni	Umani's daughter	11	12
Diami	Cousin of Babani & Jobani.	13-14	23
Labani		< 15	24
Bureni		15-17	22
Mpaseni		± 15	±39
Mazani	Sister of Nolani	13-14	30
Nolani	Sister of Mazani	Not known	33
Babani	Sister of Jobani, a cousin of Diami & childhood friend of Zani	18-22	32
Emoni		Not known	30+
Zani	Childhood friend of Babani	12	39
Mpalini		11-14	27
Jobani	Sister of Babani and cousin of Diami	16	30
Umani	Loni's mother	Not known	30+
Josina		14-15	23
Nguli		14-15	24
Iviana		Not known	25
Matiana		11-14	Early 20s
Luviana		11-14	Late 20s
Ruziana		11-14	Late 20s



All participants except Loni were still involved in prostitution. Although the sample was made up largely of young women over 18, the Malawi Youth Policy defines youth as constituting the stage between 14 and 35 years (Malawi Government, 2013). What is noticeable is that the majority in this sample first became involved in prostitution as children aged under 18 years.

In accordance with the definition set by the Youth Policy, my decision to include those aged over 30 was further reinforced. I decided to include all participants who volunteered to take part in the study without being strict on age. Firstly, this was inevitable owing to the participants the two NGOs were working with. Secondly, after observing how actively they wished to participate, and consistent with the principle of voluntary participation, I had judged that their inclusion would help me in to build rapport and engage in conversation with younger participants who may have been reticent about working with an outsider researcher, outsider in the sense of being male and being from outside the immediate area. I recognized that it was important to build trust and gain acceptability, particularly from younger participants. On the basis of empirical evidence (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; Montgomery, 2007) recommend working with people who can easily build this rapport between the researcher and participants. The participants who I was introduced to first (Zani, Labani and Iviana), the field facilitators and the female research assistant in District Y, helped me to gain acceptability and trust more easily.



**Photo 13: Ranking Current Age and age of first engagement in prostitution**

All but one participant said they engaged in prostitution during their childhood. Despite not recalling their precise age at the time, they stated that this occurred soon after reaching puberty which is likely to be between 11 and 14 years. The participants documented their current ages and the ages at first engagement in prostitution using a ranking exercise (as shown in Photo 13).

### **5.3 An Overview of the Findings**

Use of the data collection methods discussed in the previous chapter generated the following data: 18 character drawings, nine problem trees, 194 photos, two storyboards, paper-cuttings, 98 audio recordings from discussions, narrative interviews and semi-structured interviews. All these visual data were used to facilitate discussions during group meetings and individual interviews with participants.

### **5.3.1 Photovoice**

In total, 194 photos were taken. I initially asked participants to select from the pool of the photos they had taken only three photos that captured their involvement. But in respecting participants' wishes and my aspiration that they should control the research process as far as possible, all photographs were included for discussion, although participants would skip some photos and spend more time on other photos. Most of these photos were taken in District Y where the four participants were less skilled in making effective use of other visual tools. And being only four they had plenty of access to the digital cameras. Intriguing from the pool of photos were the striking similarities of the photos that participants had taken in both areas. Through elicitation of the photos, I was able to capture how participants made sense of their own involvement; and the general stories about involvement.

### **5.3.2 Character Drawings**

The participants sketched 18 character drawings, twelve of which were drawn at the start of individual interviews while the others were sketched as part of group discussions. On two occasions, participants role-played the characters they had sketched to illustrate the complexity of life in a highly gendered culture, involving both agency and economic dependency. Two of

the character drawings were sketched by Loni, aged twelve who escaped from a brothel to which she had been trafficked.

### **5.3.3 Problem Tree**

In total, nine problem trees were produced, five in District X and four in District Y, and were used both in individual interviews and group discussions to identify problems, the impact of problems and potential solutions.

### **5.3.4 Storyboard**

Only two participants used this approach. Diami, aged 23 captured her experience of involvement in this way, also depicting what she thought of prostitution. She used the sketches to show the negotiation process with a client and how the client used his power to disregard their agreement and rape her. In contrast, Jobani who also used this approach made three sketches capturing three different stages of her involvement from first engagement to her decision to continue, to how she made sense of her current involvement. Her sketches showed that it is not easy to map the process of involvement in a linear fashion. She illustrated how involvement during childhood could lead to other factors which could eventually compel one to continue engaging in prostitution into adulthood.

### **5.3.5 Paper-Cutting and Ranking**

These were used to document participants' biographical data including age of first involvement, current age as well as how they made sense of their involvement by documenting what really mattered to them. Most participants had become involved as children, some while still at primary

school. But the majority indicated 16-20<sup>14</sup> as their age of first involvement. I observed that most of the participants may have become aware while working with the NGO of the (legal) implications of someone below the age of 16 being involved in prostitution and that the activities of the NGOs were not designed to support children and young people below the age of 18 who were involved in prostitution. Thus, when asked to indicate the age which most of them were when they first started, it seems likely that some may have wished to avoid indicating their childhood involvement in prostitution. Some studies have shown that participants tend to avoid doing or saying anything which could be interpreted as challenging organisations they work with (Montgomery, 2007). I had anticipated this as one limitation of my study (see also Appendix 2(a) on p.280) But as I became more accepted, participants were more willing to open up about their lives, and most were clear through various character drawings that they became involved when they were very young (some as young as 11) and while still at primary school. I will return to the issue of age in the section discussing age at first involvement.

The use of ranking to indicate priority concerns, non-payment by clients and dwindling business emerged most strongly. Participants attributed the latter to increased number of younger girls engaging in prostitution who they discussed as more popular because they were seen as *new* and without infections by clients who preferred unprotected sex. This points to involvement as having a direct impact on children and young people's health well-being, one of the capabilities listed by Nussbaum (2003).

### **5.3.6 Narrative Interviews**

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<sup>14</sup> In Malawi, 16 is the official legal age for someone to marry (thereby consent to sex).

I conducted narrative interviews with all individual participants (N=19). These were facilitated making use of visual tools, character drawings, problem trees, storyboards and photographs to elicit rich information with central relevance for the research questions.

### **5.3.7 Semi-Structured Interviews**

In addition, I also interviewed two district social welfare officers (DSWOs) to gain a sense of how child prostitution was conceptualised within Malawi's welfare policies and programmes. These interviews were largely disappointing, indicating acknowledgement of child prostitution including trafficking, but revealing that children involved in prostitution were subsumed, at best, within a larger category of street children and revealing that there is no specific policy or programme to prevent or respond to child prostitution<sup>15</sup>. This contrasts with other categories of 'vulnerable' children including child labourers on tea and tobacco estates, and children who experience early marriage.

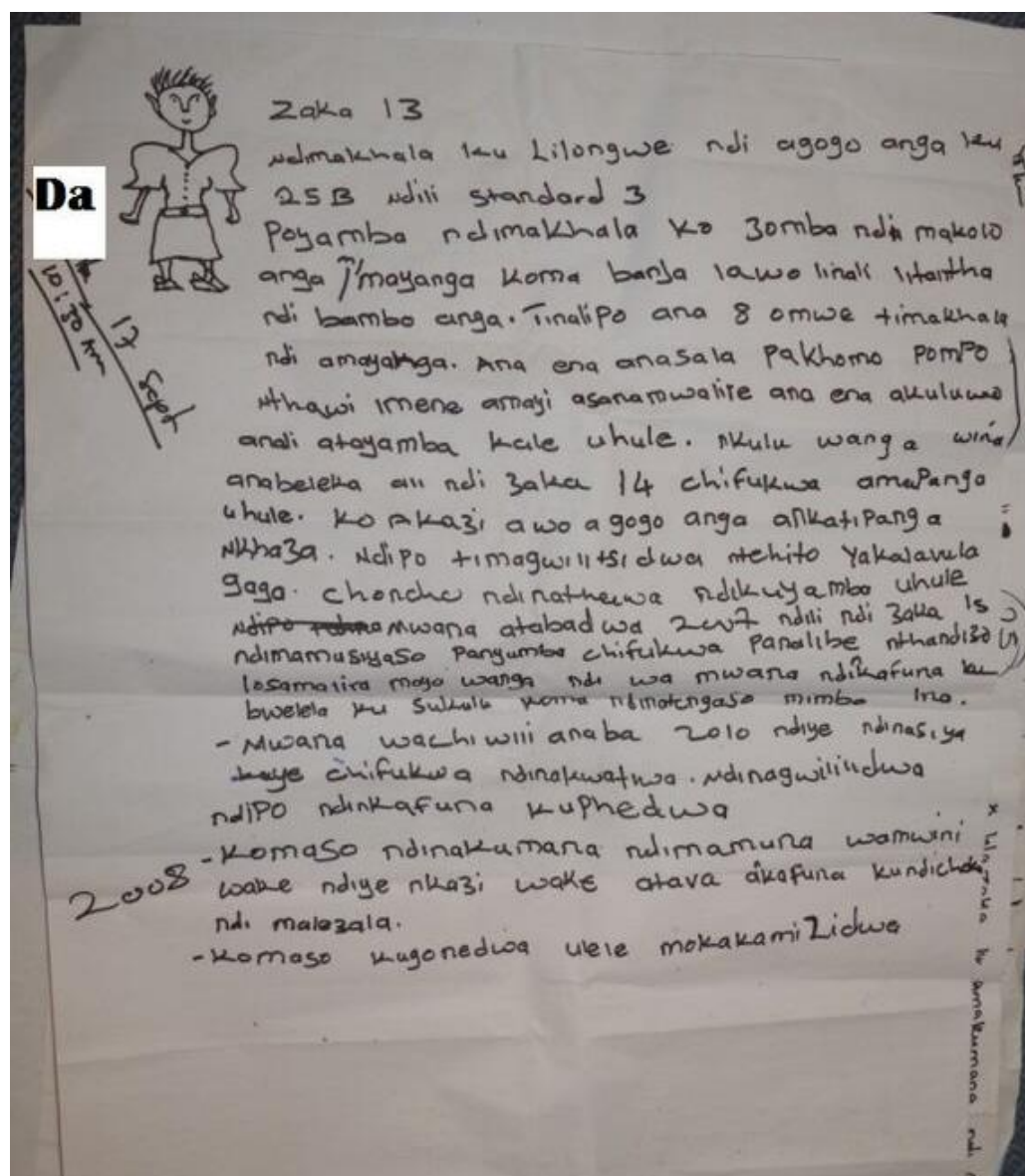
### **5.4 Age on Engaging in Prostitution**

*Diami: Ndampasa zaka 13 chifukwa akuoneka wachichepele. Akundikumbusa zaka komanso size imene ndinaymbira ineyo za u sexi worker'zo, mmenemo ndiri ndi zaka 13*

(I have given her 13 years because she looks young, a representation of my age when I was just joining) (see Photo 14).

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<sup>15</sup> As explored in Chapter 3, not all street children are involved in prostitution neither are all children involved in prostitution are street children to assume that one means of policy and practice intervention will effectively address the needs of all (Montgomery, 2001; S.-L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Warf *et al.*, 2013).



**Photo 14: Diامي's sketch of her involvement**

It was evident that most of participants joined prostitution during their childhood despite some of them being unaware of their precise age. Exact age was not significantly emphasised by participants in discussing their involvement. But what became clear throughout the discussions was that most of them had joined prostitution at a very young age. A majority, as Table 4 (p. 136) shows, first engaged in prostitution (or practices that may be regarded as prostitution by

having multiple sex partners who in turn were supporting the participants) soon after reaching puberty. However, it has been found that the onset puberty varies and (Aksglaede *et al.*, 2009; Khadgawat *et al.*, 2016; Radovick, 2016), there is a possibility therefore of initial involvement for some of the participants to have happened even earlier than reported.

This perception gained some credence through descriptions or choice of phrases in describing their early stages of involvement. Participants used terms such as *ali mwana* (child), *wachichepele*, *wang'ono* (young/younger) or *ali ku primary* (while at primary school) when talking about their initial involvement and about children and young people currently joining prostitution. Standard 4 or 5 of primary education was frequently mentioned suggesting that some joined the practice at around 13 years old. For example, Diami referred both to age and being in primary school while discussing the involvement of some of her cousins to emphasise how young they were when they first joined. She explained:

*Diami: Akakhala abale anga onse aja uhule ndiye anayamba ali achichepere ndithu. Anali gulu lomweli lachina Zani. Amatengana ife tili ting'onoting'ono. Kuzera muphirimu kuzemba kumapita kumabala ndi mkulu wathu wina. Moti mai anga akufa, onsewo panali kulibe ali ku uhule. Akugwira ku lodge ku Tatiti, nthawi imene iye amapanga uhule komabe ali wachichepele, kumathawa panyumbwa mwakuti anabereka ali ndi zaka 14. Anaberekera operation, sinanga analiwachichepele*

(My cousins, for example, started when they were very young. They would run away from home and spend days. They were not even here when my mum died because they



had gone out to prostitution. They would go out to pubs together with Zani and some of my elder sisters including the one currently working at a resthouse in Tatiti. I was very young then; so were they. One of them even gave birth when she was 14 as a result of her involvement).

Here, Diami sets a distinction made by other participants between *ana* (children) or *achichepele* (young people) on the one hand with *akuluakulu* (adults) engaged in prostitution. *Mwana/ana* is often used to refer to any child where as *achichepele* could mean youth and also children. However, the two terms were often used interchangeably to refer to the same group of adolescents who have passed through puberty that is marked through initiation ceremonies (*kuviniidwa; kutha msinkhu*). Most participants acknowledged and used the latter phase as the period when most of them, as well as young people currently involved in the practice, possibly joined the practice. Despite the precise age not being the central emphasis of involvement in the discussions, participants identified adolescence as the period of initial involvement. Some of the participants had joined at as young as 11 years in the case of Loni or Zani. Early involvement as well as early pregnancies, as I discovered and I will show in later sections, played a role in participants' continued involvement in prostitution.

## 5.5 Sites of Engagement

*Bureni: Ambiri amapangira mumabara poti kumakhala ma room komko kuti asamavutike. Akungolipira za room chifukwa kumtenga mwamuna wakukhomo mwina anthu akhoza kumakunena pamwe ukoko ukapanga ndiye kuti wathana nae sangabwere*

*iwe kulibe kuzakulanda ndalama or kuzemba iwe uli ku mseu kuzemba. Ukoko sizingatheke chifukwa ma key alindi iwe.*

(A majority prefer going to pubs in order to avoid others becoming aware of their involvement which could lead to one being ridiculed. Also, the risk of clients mugging you when you take them to your house is very high, something that can hardly happen if you do everything at the resthouse/pubs where you only have to pay for the room).

Street prostitution was the common form that most participants chose just like Bureni explains in the snippet above. They would either line up along hot-spots on the streets near busy markets/urban centres or close to pubs as captured in Photo 15 that was taken by Matiana of their friends in District Y. They however stated that they did not just stick to one site of involvement.



**Photo 15: Waiting for clients**

Others had had experience of working in resthouses and brothels. This happened in two ways. Some were recruited by resthouse and bar owners. Such recruitment was often coercive without children and young people being initially aware of the nature of work or that they were being trafficked from one area to another; leading to what is often alluded to as sex slavery (Doezema, 2010)<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, there were those who were already involved in prostitution but had travelled to a new area. This group included Luviana, Ruziana, Zani, Diami, Babani, Emoni, Mpalini and Bureni who paid for nightly accommodation at resthouses. This was also a common form of involvement for children and young people who had run away from their parental homes.

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<sup>16</sup> By sex slave, I refer to the practice where children and young people are held against their informed choice and made to directly or indirectly sell sex (Doezema, 2012).

## 5.6 Why Prostitution?



**Photo 16: Word cloud: Reasons of involvement**

This word cloud was derived from whole transcripts of group discussions and individual interviews using NVivo. The size of the words appearing in the cloud reflects the number of times these words were used in the discussions and interviews. I made use of the word cloud to identify themes, illustrating reasons for involvement. Some connections, such as *Umasiye* are clearly evident, while others are derived indirectly as the result of interconnected factors. For example, *chinamwali*, rite [of] passage, early/child marriages and pregnancy give rise to the discussion in 5.6.5 that addresses why and how the education of girls is undervalued.

Melrose (2004) argues that knowing the reason for children and young persons' involvement as well as how they end up in in prostitution is key to working out effective ways on how to support them. In this section, I will present the reasons that participants gave for their involvement.

### 5.6.1 Prostitution or Else: Growing Up in a Deprived Family

*Emoni: Timapangira chifukwa chamavuto*

(We do this because of problems/deprivation/poverty)

*Mavuto* (problems or deprivation/destitute) featured predominantly in discussions with participants. With a majority coming from a poor background, it was not surprising that almost all participants listed *poverty* or being deprived of basic needs as their main reason for becoming engaged in prostitution.

They explained that their involvement was largely quest to meet their daily needs and cater for their livelihood. In the same vein, the areas where I conducted the study were evidently



a

underprivileged and had very limited social services.

Photo 17: Food purchased from earnings through prostitution

Of course, poverty is a highly contested and relative concept. But like Emoni who uses *mavuto* (problems), participants detailed what they meant by *mavuto* as being unable to meet basic needs. Prostitution seemed to them as the means through which they could either earn a living or survive through their situation. Unsurprisingly, all participants listed money as their major motivation for prostitution, but what they spent their money on offered clues about why they had become involved in prostitution. They explained that choosing prostitution was the quickest means through which they could earn money in a quest to manage and/or overcome their deprivation. From money earned through prostitution practices, participants bought some of the basic necessities like food as captured in Photo 17. With other data indicating that most Malawians live below the poverty line as explained in Chapter Two<sup>17</sup>, involvement was not restricted to deprived areas in urban areas. Labani explained how children and young people in rural areas were also selling sex.

Labani: *Vuto ndi vuto, kaya wina akukhala ku muzi kaya mtawuni. Mavuto amafanana. Pali ana ena oti ali ndimakolo, koma sagwira ntchito amangokhala kumapululumukira maganyu. Business alibe. Pena maganyu akati asapezeke ndiye kuti agona ndi njala. Ku town kuno aliku ena amapanga zimenezo*

(Being destitute does not necessarily depend on your location. There are those who are living with their parents but who can not afford to buy food because they are neither working nor running a business or a piece work).

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<sup>17</sup> I am also aware that the poverty line as a trajectory for measuring poverty has been questioned, examined and found lacking. However, in regards to my study, most participants used *mavuto* while referring to not being able to afford food, clothes, soap or a house among other daily needs for oneself and your children.

Zani: *Eya, umenewu ndi umphwawi*

(Certainly, poverty it is).

The above explanation also suggests why brothel/pub owners/pimps were targeting rural areas for children and young people who they would recruit for prostitution in the guise of being a bar girls. As explained in Chapter 2, poverty is relatively higher in rural Malawi. As such, the number for those seeking possible means of livelihood is likely to be higher. Likewise, the number of orphans is also lower in urban areas compared to rural Malawi, which could suggest heightened risks for children and young people in need of support in rural areas.

Participants whose parents were still alive when they were joining prostitution explained that their parents were not involved in economic activities that could earn them enough money except through subsistence farming. But climatic disasters such as flooding continue to negatively affect the yield and the income that rural families can realise. Bureni stated:

Bureni: *Enanso anali mamvuto. Kusowa zakudya. Makolo anga palibe chomwe amapanga. Amangokhala...Ndiye ndikapanga ndalama ija ndimawathandiziranso mai anga.*

(Mostly, it's because of problems; being without food because my parents were destitute. They're unemployed. As such, I would use buy food and support my mother with the money I earn from prostitution).

Pearson: *Chifukwa?* (why were **you** supporting her?)

Bureni: *Amasowa thandizo, sinanga chakudya nthawi imeneyo chimasowa. Pena ndimawagulira nsalu*

(Because she could not afford food. She lacked support. I would then buy clothes for her).



**Photo 18: Where I started (by Labani)**

Labani advanced this view of prostitution during a group discussion while using Photo 18 that she had taken of a popular pub along the M1 road that connects two cities.

*Bala ilili limatikumbutsa moyo wathu momwe unasinthira. Tinali ndimavuto ambiri*

(This bar captures how we have turned our lives around. We were destitute before).

She made similar remarks during an individual interview. But, despite earning a living and surviving through prostitution, she touched on something that has not often received attention. The notion of sex work, for example, as depicted on by the liberal feminist or structure and



agency perspectives on prostitution often regards women as being able to consent to sex, and to involvement in prostitution as an outcome of choice.

Labani: Ineyo u sex work uja ngakhale ndimangopangira kuti nditani, panalibe chilichose chomwe ndingapange, ndinalibe chilichose choti ndingapezere ndalama. Ndiyeno ndipanga bwanji. Koma ineuyo mmoyo mwanga sizimangisangalasa ai. Ndinalibe choice ndi mmene zinalili. Ichi ndichifukwa ndinapita kwa mzanga uja (ku South Africa), koma kukhalanso kumene kuja kuona ntchito yake ya ukapolo. Basi apa ndinangoti ndizingochivomereza chilichonse chimene chingandipeze

(I engage in sex work merely because I don't have a choice. What else could I do except this; I did not have anything to earn money. So, upon reflecting over what I could do, I picked prostitution. But that does not mean I like what I am currently doing. I have tried to leave before. This is why I once went to South Africa as I was trying to find things I could do. But even there, I was working like a slave. As such, I returned home and rejoined sex work because I did not have a choice).

Labani captures the efforts that people make before deciding to engage in prostitution as the means through which they can address their daily needs. Her involvement was not the result of free choice. There was something that drove her into the practice. She was not physically forced but being deprived meant she either had to consider ways through which she could survive. It is this context of being in poverty, and embarking on a quest to overcome/address it, that some children and young women are easily targeted by traffickers. I will return to this on a section where I present the common pathways into prostitution for the participants.

Meantime, Labani's description of involvement as survival or as a means of earning a living is reinforced by Umani whose daughter, Loni, had been lured from District X to District Y. She broadened her story of involvement to explain why others in similar situations do not end up joining prostitution. Through her, we see that involvement is not just being poor but the actual absence of support.

*Umani: Koma azibale ambili panopa iwonso ali ndi mavuto awo inenso ndili ndi mavuto anga ndiye kuti ana onse ndiwathandize, ndalama ijanso imapezeka si ikukwana koma anawo amafuna kuthandiza kuchokera kwa ineyo*

(Most of my relatives have their own responsibilities so I can not burden them further with my own. But I was unable to raise enough money (from a small-scale business enterprise of selling second hand clothes and rice) to support my own children who looked at me as the primary provider of their basic needs).

Umani considered her relatives as her possible source of alternative support, saying she was unable to support herself and her children without what she earned from prostitution. She told me that she had not gone further with education as she had previously married and dropped out of school as a result. She touches on how Malawi, a highly patriarchal society, limits the role of girls and women to one of a child-bearer/housewife. The male, on the other hand, is set as the primary means of support for the females in playing this role of a housewife. I return to this theme later in the chapter.

Mpalini also referred to survival needs when I asked her why her cousin and Loni left District Y. She replied: “*mwina chisamaliro ndi chochepa* (It is possible that they left because they were not getting basic support). Because of poverty or being deprived of basic needs, almost all participants mentioned using money earned through prostitution primary to buy food.

Bureni: *Ndalamayo ndikaipeza ndimangogula chakudya basi chifukwa ndimakhala ndi agogowo kapena kuthandizira azibale anga. Koma pena sister wanga uja iyeyonso amatumiza kapena amabwera chifukwa ndalama zikuvuta pano*

(I just buy food whenever I make money. I am currently staying with my grandmother, so I help her or help to support my other relatives. There are times my sister [who is based in Lilongwe doing prostitution] gives me a hand to support the family because I am currently not making enough money).

So, it is not just being poor or the need for money that serves as a motivation for those involved in prostitution. Some participants were spending their earnings to support older family members. Few used the money for material needs or leisure. However, most participants said they often used money for a party after basic needs have been catered for. This usually involved going out for drinks to the same places where they met clients.

### **5.6.2 Umasiye: Being an Orphan & Growing Up with a Single Mother**

In addition to poverty (at family or childhood level), being an orphan also featured highly as the reason that drove some of the participants into prostitution. Losing one or both parents was raised as both the reason and precursor for children and young people to join prostitution and the

connection between poverty and being an orphan contributed towards their continuing involvement.

*Mpalini: Bambo ake anali atamwalira iyeyu ali ndi zaka 11. Anali ali standard 4*

(She lost her father when she 11. She was in Standard 4 then.)

Being an orphan also emerged as one of the push factors that drive children and young people into prostitution. Almost all the participants had grown up without one or both parents. From the onset, *umasiye* (orphanhood) was widely referenced by participants when discussing their pathways into prostitution. It should be stated that in Malawi, being heavily patriarchal, most social groups consider the husband/father as the head and the breadwinner of the family. Thus, losing a father (through death or divorce) implies loss of a primary means of support. This is likely to limit the means of support for other members of the family who have to identify alternative forms of support through which they could be supported or find means of support in the absence of the primary breadwinner. Selling sex was listed as one of the ways that some of the participants used to meet their needs. For example, Mpaseni was never involved in prostitution when her father was alive. She was still at school when her father died and her mother started experiencing challenges to cater for her Mpaseni and her brother. She explained that after her father death, they relocated to their home village where support was not adequate.

*Mpaseni: Timaenda kuchoka kuno [C] kupita kumakapemphetsa ku L kwa amwenye*

(As a result, my mother and I used to walk from C to L to beg).

The distance between the two places is about 80km, a distance that they covered almost every day, showing their resilience in order to manage in the absence of a traditional breadwinner.

When she got married, Mpaseni stopped street begging. She settled down until her husband's death. But just as her mother had experienced, the passing away of her husband removed her source of survival.

In the same vein, Emoni never mentioned any involvement preceding her husband's passing. During one group discussion, the issue of being an orphan was raised as a crucial factor that fueled the participants' decisions to enter prostitution and raised again while talking about the children and young people the participants came across regularly. Participants gave a vivid explanation of how losing either one or both parents influenced their involvement. They explained that this negatively impacts the means of financial and emotional support that children and young people get from their parents.

*Labani: Atamwalira mai, chifukwa bambowa akakwatira mkazi wina yemwe atadane ndi mwana uja. Ndiye mwana uja atha kungoganiza kuti apapa mmene zililimu ndingoyambapo basi. Chifukwa sinanga abambo aja akumakhala kuti apita kuntchito, pakhomo mwana uja azikhala ndi mai kwambiri.*

(Losing your parents can drive you to prostitution particularly if it is your mother because your father will find another woman who may be abusive or not care enough for you because she is the one who is always with you while your father would be away at work. This is likely to make you consider options rather than embrace the mistreatment. In the end, you may join prostitution because you don't want anything to do with your father and his wife.

*Babani: Komanso kumwalira kwa abambo ako kubweretsera mavuto, sinanga iwo ndi amene anali pa ntchito pamene amai aja anali housewife eti. Ndiye kuti ngati breadwinner anali mzibambo yemwenso wamwalira, ndiye kuti amayi aja akhala pachisoweko, mavutotu basi, kumakanika kuti azisamalanso ana aja. Zimene zija zimapangitsanso kuti munthu ayambepe*

(Adding to what she has said, losing your father is more unbearable, him being the breadwinner. It would be difficult for the mother to support the children by herself due to the fact that she was just a housewife. In the end, this would leave the children to consider ways through which they could earn money. As a result, some may end up joining prostitution).

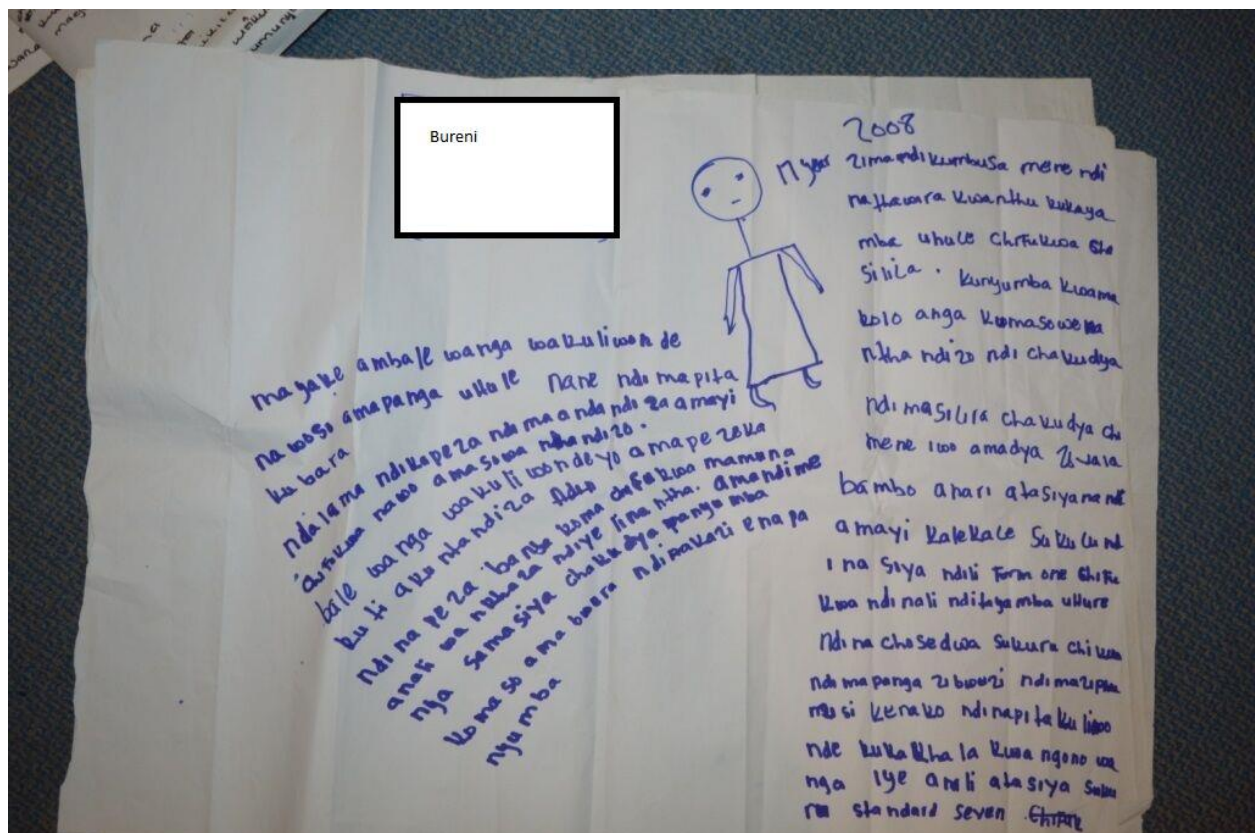


Photo 19: Orphanhood (sketch by Bureni)

Likewise, as we see in the character drawing (Photo 19) that Bureni sketched about her involvement, almost all the participants were either orphaned during childhood or grew up in a single parent household (often with a mother who was hardly working) where means of (parental) support was very limited. Here we see a strong interconnection between poverty (as discussed in the previous section) and being an orphan. The connection comes about because of the lack of support for both children and young people in these two situations that drive them to settle for prostitution.

Being an orphan was repeatedly mentioned as involving, an increased risk of being deprived of basic needs and experiencing child poverty. This is how Bauleni explained her reasons for involvement while using this sketch:

- *Bambo anali atasiyana ndi amai kalekale* (my parents had seperated).
- *Ndalama ndikaipeza ndimathandizira amai chifukwa nao akusowa thandizo* (I also support my mother with the money I earned from the practice ).
- *Banja linatha chifukwa mwamuna samasiya chakudya komanso amabwera ndi akazi panyumba* (My husband separated because he became promiscuous and stopped supporting me with my daily needs like food).

The circumstances (being an orphan and lacking support) which made Bureni to decide on her course of action – were repeatedly shared among other participants. Highly related to the first point that pinned poverty as the primary reason that pushed participants into prostitution, the

passing away of one's parents or *separation between* parents constrained the support or provision of daily needs for children and young people.

*Labani: Nditalamba mayeso a 8, bambo anga anazamwalira ndiye zinthuno zinayamba kuvuta kwambiri. Ndinakhala pakhomu zaka ziwiri osapita ku school chifukwa fees imavuta. Ndiyeno ndinayamba zibwenzi. Moti nthawi imenoyoyo ndikanakhala kuti mwinanso ndiri pabanja. Ndinali ndi dzaka pakatikati pa 13 ndi 14. Nthawi imeneyo ndikangofuna kuti mwina ndikhale pa bwanja. Ndikawona kuti mwai oti ndizapitenso ku school suzapezekanso ndimene zinthu zinalilili. Ndiye ndimkafuna kukwatirana ndimwamuna wina yemwe amapanga business yogulitsa makala amene ndinapanga naye chibwenzi.*

(Soon after writing my primary school leaving exams, my father died. Following his death, we found ourselves in an extremely difficult situation to cater for our needs. I temporarily dropped out of school for two years. I started thinking of marrying. When I was 13 or 14, I got into a relationship. I came too close to marrying him. He was supporting me through his charcoal business. I had given up on school with how things were. So, marriage was my only focus).

Labani mentioned that her mother was not allocated anything from her deceased father's properties. He was practicing polygamy and had multiple wives as a result. Also, he had not officially been married with Labani's mother. As a result, after his death, the attention was given to the other wives. Labani's case resonates with Mpaseni's, which to some extent, touch on inheritance practices which can leave some children unsupported following the death of one or



both parents in some parts of Malawi. As the stories of these two participants show, children (and women) who are reliant on the primary breadwinner (i.e. the father), are left without foundation to back their inheritance claims to the properties left by the deceased. As a result, the participants mentioned what has been reported widely about pervasive cases of property grabbing by relatives when the father/husband dies. Often, the father/husband's relatives claim ownership of everything (including children in some instances) based on the argument that all property belonged to the husband (and that the woman would marry another man who would provide for her and the children). After campaigns against property grabbing by government and NGOs working on gender equality in Malawi (which has contributed towards the passing of the 2015 *Marriage Act*), other relatives would offer to support children with the aim of claiming the property, a point that Mpaseni identified as having driven her and her mother into poverty:

*Tili ku welfare kuja abale abambo anga anabwela kuzatenga katundu yense. Amapitanso kwa a DC kukatenga ndalama kumati akumatiyang'anira ndikumatilipilira fees*

(While still in Blantyre, my father's relatives took everything. They left us without anything. They also collected my father's pensions on pretence that they were looking for us and paying for our school fees).

Labani made similar remarks, only that coming from a polygamous family, and unlike her mother, the other wives had undergone traditional procedures for marriage which gave them a claim to the properties because they were recognised by her father's relatives. After his passing, the relatives advised Labani and her siblings to leave their mother to be fostered by the other wives or the relatives. Labani and her siblings turned down this request:

*Atamwalira bambo aja, ifeyo satanigawileko chilichonse chifukwa amai anga sanalowedwe. Anatiwuza kuti tisakhepo kumakakhala ndi iwo, koma tinakana. Koma poti amai anali asanalowedwe, basi tinangopita kumudzi. Sister wanga wina yemwe anali atakwatira akukhala kunoko ndi amene amkawathandiza amai aja ndi ifeyo*

(We were not allocated anything following my father's death because there was no dowry price paid by my father to my mother's family. We were asked to live with the other relatives instead of our mother but we refused. Luckily, one of my sisters had married and was the one who was supporting us).

None of the participants who were orphans had received any inheritance on the death of their fathers. There is therefore a possibility that the number of children and women who are left with no provision following the death of the father/husband are likely to become higher. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the number of orphans in Malawi has been exacerbated by higher incidence of HIV and AIDS with an infection rate that is one of the highest in the world. This means there are more orphans or households without the traditional means of support as the HIV related deaths are higher among men. In Malawi, maternal, paternal and double orphans are approximately 5, 10 and 3 % respectively (Shoko and Ibisomi, 2016), figures that paint a daunting challenge for children, families and government.

In District X, Labani, Jobani, Zani, Babani and Mpaseni were double orphans – having lost both parents (Kidman and Palermo, 2016; Shoko and Ibisomi, 2016). Mazani, Nolani, Loni and Josina grew up in a household headed by by a mother – i.e., they were raised by a single mother. In

District Y, Iviana only made reference to her mother suggesting she was from a single parent household. With this understanding, Diami insinuated that had her mother not died, she would not have ended up in prostitution because much as she was in a woman headed household, she never lacked support even though her mother worked as a messenger, a ‘pink collar job’ (Mastracci, 2016), attracting a low wage (Jacobsen, 2016).

*Diami: Akanakhala kuti alipo sibwenzi ndikupanga uhule chifukwa mai anga anali akugwira ntchito ndipo chilichonse ndimachipeza moyowanga. Ndipo ngati kunali mwana yemwe amamkonda kwambiri ndinali inyeyo. Kundikonda kumeneko bwenzi kupitilirabe mpaka pano. Ngati ineyo ndinayamb cCdsXjDo monga ndikuneneramo ndi chifukwa chamavuto chifukwa akuluakuluwo akanakhala kuti akamachoka pakhoma ndikundisiyira chirichonse choyenera ineyo sindikanakhala ndinzeru zoti ndikapange u hule; kapena kupanda awawa azichimwene anga kundipanga nkhanza zimene amandipanga muja ndanenera muja, bwenzi ndiri komkobe.*

(If my mother was still alive, I would not have joined sex work because she could have been supporting me as she was working. I only got involved to survive. My older siblings could not afford to support me. My grandparents’ family, who had taken me, was not supportive at all with the harassment that I was made to go through while living with them. So, I could not continue living with them.)

Diami touches on several areas of involvement in prostitution. She repeated how being an orphan ignited her involvement. But she also showed that involvement was largely part of her quest for support to meet her basic needs. The experience of being mistreated by extended family

members who foster orphans was also reinforced, leading her to prefer to be on her own rather than remain in an environment that was clearly not supportive. The possibility of finding a supportive environment within the family following the death of a parent may help to explain why some orphans do not end up in prostitution. This is where I continue in the next section.

### **5.6.3 Lack of Subsistence Support**

Lack of subsistence support for the participants in this study was the result of complex interconnections of different circumstances including orphanhood, violence and abuse associated with substitute family care or early marriage with all of these circumstances exacerbated by poverty. HIV/AIDS has led to a huge increase in number of orphans in Malawi (Conroy *et al.*, 2016). Participants were acutely aware of the growing numbers of children and young people who are without primary means of support and thereby likely to engage in prostitution. However, participants themselves showed that much as the risk is higher, not all orphans end up engaging in prostitution. Jobani, Diami, Babani as well as Josina provided a more critical way of making sense of orphanhood as one factor that driving children and young people into prostitution. While envisaging how they might not have ended up in prostitution despite being orphans, participants touched on some of the reasons that make orphanhood one of the many factors that contribute in different ways towards the decisions that participants made about deciding to join prostitution.

Diami mentioned that following the death of her mother, she was fostered and lived with her grandparents who were providing for her. In this way, she avoided immediately joining prostitution. As such, it can be argued that the passing of her mother did not immediately lead to

her involvement but increased her vulnerability to the possibility selling sex. She did not immediately join because she had another means of support through her grandparents:

*Diambi: Ndimakhala ndi a gogo anga ku Lilongwe. Ndinakhala nao pafupifupi zaka five. Ndinapita ndiri mu standard 3. Poyambilira ndi makhala ko kuno ndi mai anga. Banja lawo ndi bambo anga linali litatha. Ndiyeno atamwalira mai anga, agogo anga ananditenga ine komanso achina Jobani nthawi imeyo ali ka msikana timabere titayamba pa mtimapa. Tonse tinalipo ana 8...Koma agogo akazi aja ndiye anali ndi nkhanza. Achina Jobani anathawa chifukwa chankhaza zimaoneka pakhomopo. Olo kugwira ntchito pakhomopo kunali kwakalavulagaga kuja, kumagwira ngati ana antchito. Ife ngati ana ang'noang'ono tinalibe ufulu oti ndikuyankhula kuti zimenezi zikuchitika chifukwa chani. Ndiye a china Jobani onsewa anachita kukanika kupilira mpaka anathawa kubwerelanso kuno. Chifukwa chachikhalidwe chapakhomopo anakanika kuti apilire. Amai awo anali asanamwalire koma akudwala mwakayakaya muja. Life imene imachitika achina Jobani'wo anali asanayizolowere, chifukwa ndi amai awo, ife zimenezo tinali tisanaziwonepo. Ndiye anapezeka pankhomo paja iwo achokapo kumakhala okha*

(I was staying with my grandparents in Lilongwe. They took me when I was in Standard 3 and I lived with them for about 5 years. Before I moved there, I was staying here with my mother. She had separated with my father then. But following her death, my grandparents took me. In total, there were 8 children living with them. But my grandmother was very cruel. Babani and Jobani, who had been taken to be looked after together with I, would frequently run away. We were overworked. It felt as slavery, more

like hard labour. We never enjoyed any freedom. As a result of what we were going through, Jobani and Babani left. They returned here. We had never experienced that life before with our parents still alive).

According to Diami, she only engaged in prostitution when she left her grandparents' home because of the mistreatment she was experiencing; being overworked as well as starved. She likened her treatment, and the level of cruelty she experienced while being looked after by her grandmother, to slavery (*ukapolo*) or *kavulagaga* (which either denotes hard labour as in prison or *thangata*, the type of labour that colonialists forced on people). But after leaving, the means of support that she was getting from her grandparents was cut off. As such, like Mpaseni, one of the orphans who did not have anybody to provide her with support, Diami was faced with the need to seek ways she could survive.

Diami's treatment is not uncommon in Malawi. The maltreatment that orphans in Malawi can go through when being looked after by relatives and other guardians has been documented by other researchers (Munthali, 2002; Beard, 2005; Zimmerman, 2005), and her own experience of maltreatment made her leave her grandparents to seek other alternative means of refuge. She said this is what set her path into prostitution as inevitable. Leaving the grandparental home can be interpreted as rebelling in most Malawian cultures as children are expected to submit without questioning to the authority of elders particularly guardian. This is emphasised through a saying "*parents/elders are God's incarnate (makolo ndi Mulungu wachiwili or wa pansi pano)*" that position elders at the level of God whose commandment is expected among religious circles to be absolute and unquestionable; and Malawi is predominantly religious.

In one group discussion facilitated using a sketch of a 13-year-old girl, participants listed physical abuse and *cruelty* by relatives for those who were orphans. Such knowledge of the experience of violence and abuse by relatives has induced fear in young people that being looked after by relatives following the loss of parents is not always the best, or even a possible, option. This is aptly illustrated by the following extract from the group discussion:

Jobani: *Umasiye* (being an orphan)

Zani: *[While referring to a sketch that they had drawn] Koma uyu makolo ali nawo ndiye ukhala bwanji umasiye*

(but this girl has both her parents)

Babani: *It depends, pena atha kukhala makolo onse pena kholo limodzi koma munthu kumavutika ngati wamasiyenso*

(It depends because there are those who have either one or both parents but are treated worse than orphans)

Jobani: *Makamaka akasala bambo. Sinanga amakakwatira kwina, ndiye mai aja amati pakhomo pano ana akunjira ai*

(Especially, if you lose your mother. Your father can marry another woman who may refuse to accommodate another woman's daughters").

Zani: *Athanso osakuthamangitsa koma kumangokupanga nkhanza poti ndi okupeza*

(She may not even ask you to leave but just ill-treat you).

Jobani: *Even makolo okubereka amathanso kumakuchita nkhanza*

(Even your biological parents can be cruel to you).

This discussion also captures the fact that reasons for involvement are not clear, often arising from multiple factors to contribute to a conclusion that involvement in prostitution is seen as the plausible choice. The extract from the group discussion above shows that it was physical abuse which led both Diami and Jobani to leave their family homes, yet this might easily be interpreted as ‘running away from home’, a category commonly seen in studies (Cusick, 2002; S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Barnardo’s, 2009; Lukman, 2009b). None of the participants in this study referred to sexual abuse within their own family as a reason for leaving home, often seen in other studies. But some participants did refer to being beaten by the relatives who had offered to care for them as orphans. Most societies in Malawi still regard beating a child as a form of discipline. In addition to escaping this form of physical abuse, the absence of a supportive caregiver was a significant issue contributing to orphans’ decisions to engage in prostitution.

Pearson: *Kuti iyeyu asayambe, chikuyenera kuchitika ndichani?*

(What could have prevented her from joining the practice?).

Babani: *Mwina atapezeka achibale ena ake oti ndi okoma mtima oti ndikumutenga ndikumpitsa ku school.*

(May be if she could find supportive relatives who could take her and pay for her school fees).

Jobani: *or kungopita ku orphan-care*

(Alternatively, being raised in an orphanage/residential care centre for orphans).

Babani: *Koma ma orphanage alongosoka alipo? Kuli bwino kuthandizidwa ndi achibale*

(But are there credible orphan cares? I’d prefer being supported by relatives).

Jobani: *Koma achibalewo alipo? Inu munawapeza?*



(But do caring relatives exist? Did you find them?)

Babani: *pali ena amapezeka oti ali ndi achibale owakonda bwino. Mwina ife tinali ndi tsoka oti tinali ndi makolo oti anali ndi achibale opanda chikondi*

(There are some orphans who manage to be fostered and taken into care by very supporting and loving relatives. May be we were just unlucky that our parents' relatives were cruel).

Another example of the complexity of reasons for engaging in prostitution is offered by Diami. Following the death of her mother she went to live with her grandparents but after five years of being overworked, beaten and denied food she ran away. In this way, it can be argued that she was not engaging in prostitution primarily because she was an orphan. As with other participants, Diami framed her involvement in terms of survival; the quickest means of earning money “to buy food on a daily basis” (*kuti tipeze ndalama yogulira chakudya chathu chalero*) because they lacked support from a primary breadwinner or due to the absence of a subsistence family care and support.

Running away from home was not limited to those who were orphaned. As we can see from Bureni's drawing of her involvement (Photo 19, p.158) and words below, some children run away from their parental homes due to limited support in an attempt to overcome their poverty. In other words, running away was seen by participants as the exercise of resilience, a way of coping or managing deprivation and the hope of seeking various money generating activities<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Conceptualising this as running away can therefore be challenged. However, I refer to this concept to imply leaving a home (parental or fostered) without permission and knowledge of the parental figure (Barnardo's, 2009; Lukman, 2009b).

*Bureni: Zimandikumbutsa mmene ndimathawira kwathu kukayamba uhule chifukwa chosilira. Kunyumba kwamakolo anga kumasowa thandizo ndi chakudya. Ndimasilira chakudya chimene iwo amadya, zovala zomwe amagula.*

(This sketch reflects my pathway into prostitution. I wanted to be happy with good meals and better clothes just like my friends).

This reinforces what participants repeatedly explained, that poverty was a fundamental driver of their involvement in prostitution. But it is clear that other factors, such as orphanhood and experiences of family violence, can easily exacerbate individual motivation to seek independent means of survival which all too easily leads unsupported girls and young women into prostitution.

#### **5.6.4 The Role of Social Networks: The Normalisation of Prostitution**

Orchard's (2007) study of young Devadasis in rural India shows what has become a normative progression in life for girls whose mothers are engaged in prostitution whereby there is an assumption that this is their path in life. While there was no evidence of such a strong sense of normalisation among participants in this study, they debated the role of childhood experiences of family and of mothering in contributing to what some likened to 'hereditary' prostitution.

*Diami: Of course, tikhoza kunena kuti ndi zakumtundu sinanga ndi family tonse.*

(We can argue that doing prostitution is hereditary considering that all my family members are doing prostitution).

Participants also highlighted the role played by members of their social network as crucial in informing their involvement. It was clear during my fieldwork that not all children and young people in the area were involved in prostitution despite sharing similar background characteristics with participants. There were those from very poor background while others were orphans without any subsistence family support. Participants themselves were aware of this and commented that not all children in these circumstances were selling sex. This led me to consider the question, why do some children and young people like participants engage in prostitution while others do not?

Participants pointed to the role that family members (siblings or relatives) as well as friends play in decisions about involvement. As Diami (above) explained, some participants considered involvement as ‘hereditary’ since most of those involved had a relative or very close friend also involved in prostitution. Almost all participants stated that they had someone close to them who was involved. This could have been a sibling, mother, relatives, neighbour or a very close friend as in the case of Babani, Jobani and Zani. And Bureni’s account while talking about her cousins and sisters drew a vivid reference to this:

*Bureni: Ali ku Lilongwe uja anayamba ali mwana chifukwa olo ku Mozambique wakhalako...Amai ake ali ku Mozambique ku uhule. Ndiye atapanga uhule pa Kachele anawasatira mai aja kumakapangira limodzi ku Mozambique kuja.*

(My cousin who is currently in Lilongwe started when she was young. She has even been to Mozambique where she had followed her mother who is also a sex worker).

Bureni has three sisters, two of whom are involved in prostitution including one aged 13. Her youngest sister, aged nine, according to Bureni, is aware that her sisters are in the prostitution business. Bureni's cousin, Mpalini, who became involved in prostitution even earlier than Bureni felt that Bureni's decision to join prostitution was the result of the influence of other family members.

*Mpalini: Bureni uja akatisilira ifeyo. Si nanga timati tikayenda ku mseu, timagawa chakudya chija chifukwa timakhala tonse pa khomo paja ndi kuphikanso limodzi, mwina amai wonso ali popo, adya nawonso. Ndiye komabe timaonetsetsa kuti ine amene ndavutika ku mseuku ndidye moyenerera si nanga ndaluza ma weight eti. Ndiye enawo ndimangowagawilako kuti kungochotsa tsambi...Kenako Bureni anazayambanso kumakhala ngati tikuthandizana pakhomopo.*

(Bureni used to admire those of us who were doing sex work. Much as we shared with the rest of the family food we prepared from our earnings, we always got the lion's share to go with the labour pain of our involvement...Bureni then also joined, supporting each other to cater for the family).

Mpalini's explanation sets a point of departure from Diami's explained earlier in the section: instead of looking at it as something that was hereditary, she is of the view that knowledge of the additional material benefits had attracted Bureni to the practice.

Two other things can also be drawn from Bureni and Mpalini's words. Firstly, the sense that filial responsibility cannot be overlooked and providing support for parents or siblings had been a motivating force to become engaged in prostitution. Mpalini revealed that she was contributing support for her family by buying food among other things, saying:

*“Panopa amaiwo tikumawathandiza ndifeyo”.*

(My siblings and I are currently the ones who are supporting our mother/or [whole family]).

This was common among participants who had daughters, and orphans who felt responsibility to look after their younger siblings. Labani had a similar explanation, showing that she used her earnings from prostitution to support her elderly mother who had no alternative income. And her story also shows that it was the connection she had with her friends and the resulting peer influence that led her to see prostitution as a way of generating income.

Another important observation is participants' normalisation of prostitution - framing of the practice as an accepted form of income generating activity. In other words, the practice was simply seen as way of earning money, whether to cater for basic daily living needs or material needs/leisure. This framing was associated with growing up and seeing members of one's social network engaged in prostitution. It was for this reason that participants like Diami considered involvement as hereditary practice (*zakumtundu*). Clearly, she did see not anything unusual about prostitution considering that all her siblings, relatives and friends (within their neighbourhood) were also involved; including those she had grown up with. After leaving her grandparents' house in Lilongwe, she started living with her cousins (Jobani and one of her sisters) who were

already involved. Prostitution was therefore the first alternative when her cousin/sister would leave for other districts without leaving them with enough money for food.

*Diame: Ndiye timatengana ine ndi Jobani, munthu ndimkulu wake. Anali akukhala kumeneko. Nayenso anali atayamba kale, kumyenda, amachoka. Ndiye timanyamuka limodzi kumapita. Koma ndingooona kuti zinaniso zimakhala zakumtundu chifukwa azibale anga panalibe wina amaoneka olongosoka.*

(While there, Jobani and I would be going out for prostitution together. I could as well say, it is hereditary as I do not have any relative who is not involved).

Here, Diame further repeats her view of involvement as hereditary and drew my attention to the influence played by the involvement of her family members and childhood friends. But this is also connected to other factors raised in the previous sections showing that a lack of support drove children and young people into prostitution. For those from deprived households without the support of a primary breadwinner or absence of subsistence family care, the knowledge that prostitution was enabling others in similar situation to make ends meet contributed to a romanticised view of prostitution as the means to a fulfilling life. The consensus among participants in District X was that involvement of friends and family members directly or indirectly influenced their decision to settle for prostitution as the possible, quickest means of earning money for their daily needs.

Some participants offered a hypothetical illustration, discussing factors that could possibly drive their daughters to prostitution. They argued that growing up in a household/neighbourhood

where those close to them were selling sex would easily enable children and young people to normalise prostitution as something to cater for both their basic and non-basic needs. There was an understanding that seeing siblings, relatives or friends leading a better or luxurious lifestyle through prostitution created a romanticised image of the practice and set a path for joining the practice. As Mpaline said, referring to a character sketch of a young girl:

*Mpalini: Akhoza kumasilira ndikumakhala ndi maganizo oti yambepo si ifenso akutiwona mmene tikupangira, ndiye kuti nayenso akufuna ayende mu chimenechocho.*

(It is easy for them to desire prostitution while seeing the life we lead as a result of our involvement).

Emoni was of the view that prostitution resulted in neglecting her daughters because she left them without anyone to look after them. In turn, she said this increased their possibility of joining.

*Emoni: sinanga mai kawirikawiri sukupezeka pakhomo, ndiye iwo amapeza chance yotuluka yopanga zimene akufuna kusiya ndimayi oti akukala makhomo kawirikawiri. Chifukwa atha kumaona moyo wa iwe ngati mai ndikuyamba kusilira nawo, ati ihh ndiye uku amakapezako ndalama. Inenso ndiyamba uhule.*

(Because we frequently leave them alone at night, they could be encouraged to do as they wish since there is no one to guide them. In the end, they may be attracted to join. They could also become aware through our involvement that this is what they could be doing if at all they needed to earn money themselves).

At the time of this interview one of Emoni's daughters was pregnant but not married while another was about to marry.

Participants like Diami and Mpalini, explained about their career goals while growing up, saying whatever they had wished to become was to be like their mothers. In this way, the involvement of parents to some extent frames prostitution as an occupation that children may also adopt.

Diami said:

*Ineyo ndili wachichepele, ndimasilira amai anga akamapita kuntchito. Nthawi zambiri ndimawauza kuti ine ndimafuna ndikazamaliza sukulu ndimafuna ndizagwire ntchito ngati yanuyo. Nane ndizizayenda ngati pagalimoto. Ndimangonena kuti ntchito ngati yanuyo koma sindimaziwa. Ndimangoziwa kuti amai amapita kuntchito, amazatengedwa, amazasiyidwa, koma sindimaziwa ntchito yake.*

(While growing up, I used to tell my mother that I wanted to be like her (working at a post office). I did not really know her job but I told her it's something I wished I could become upon completing school. I wanted to be like her because she could be picked up in the morning and dropped after work).

Likewise, Mpalini stated:

*Ndili mwana ndimkafuna ndizakhale mphuzitsi...kuthekera kuti chifukwa cha amai poti ndimasilira ntchito yomwe amagwira.*

(When I was growing up, I wanted to be a teacher. It is possible this was because my mother was working as a teacher).



With these explanations, the role of siblings, relatives, friends and other family members became much clearer to me. Diami and Mpalini both offer clues that as much as people are active agents with the ability to exercise agency, decisions they make are not independent of the influence that other actors' in one's social world play. I present further evidence and argument in this sense in section 6.2 where I look at how participants themselves made sense of their involvement.

Mpaseni even said she would not be surprised if she were to meet her daughter at a pub with a client since she had failed to meet their needs and, as her first role model, her daughter may well shape her lifestyle in line with her mother's.

*Mpaseni: Ngakhale sindinakumanepo nawo ku balako, koma si ndi asikana, zitha kutheka kuti nawo kumapita poona kuti mwina sindikutha kukwaniritsa zina zomwe amafuna iwo. Ndiye atha kukumana ndimwamuna oti kuwapasa K500 iwo atha kulola kuti akadyere kusukulu sinanga mwina amakhala ndinjala, mwinanso zovala kapena zakudya chifukwa ufa umatha kutithera panjira. Iwowo amapezeka akupanganso maganyu, kumawachapira anthu; zimene zingawapangitse kuti alowerere.*

(Although I have not met them, there is a possibility they could be doing this considering that they are also girls. So, if they could accept if a boy was to give them K500 as pocket money knowing that they often spend some days without food or lack clothes. At times, they even engage in piece-work such as doing other people's laundry as I am unable to cater for the whole month with my current earnings. This could certainly make them join).

While explaining the possibility of her daughter's involvement in terms of the influence that her own involvement could have on her, Mpaseni also touches on the position of females in a patriarchal Malawi. She explained that as a female it was expected that she (i.e. her daughter) would be involved in some kind of sexual relationship in order to meet her daily subsistence and material needs. And, opening space up to consider the plight of children, particularly girls, whose mothers are in prostitution Bureni stated that she could hardly advise her daughter against prostitution. She repeated her idea of involvement as hereditary *zoyamwira* (*hereditary*) but added the possibility of exercising individual choice.

*Bureni: Komanso ndi chisankho chake. Chifukwa atha kufunsa kuti inu pamene mumapanga muja amakulesani ndi ndani, kumanena kuti ndizoyamwira. Koma ndimafuna azamalize sukulu.*

(It's her own decision and choice. She could say not only has she inherited it from me but I should not bother discouraging her because nobody stopped me).

What is also clear here is that involvement in prostitution is not necessarily hereditary as some of the participants described, nor something children and young people wish or want to end up doing. Mpaseni, for example, has shown that her involvement was not something she had initially wished and wanted, if her living conditions, over which she had no control, had not changed. Participants explained that their decision to engage in prostitution was shaped by other factors such as losing one's parents or the absence of support (both from biological parents or subsistence family care) to cater for one's daily subsistence or material needs. But in all cases,

the influence of one's social network is crucial in tilting children and young people's focus to see involvement as possible way of earning and meeting their own support needs.

Although influence was not always direct, we see different factors contributing to participants' decisions to engage in prostitution. Almost all participants referred to having been *told* about sex work by their friends as a primary factor in engaging in prostitution. For example, Matiana left her uncle's place and started living with her friend who was engaged in prostitution. Matiana then told Iviana that prostitution could enable her to cater for her needs without having to rely on her husband. This is the same story about the direct influence of friends including Diami who was often left without support by her older sister.

*Mpaseni: Nditabwera kuno ndinafikira kwa mzanga yemwe akati kufuna nthito amaona kuluza. Anati inetu ndimayenda ndipo chockudya ndimachipezera momwemo, kufuna nthito ndimaona kuluza, ndiye tiye tikayiwale mavuto.*

(After returning, I started living with a friend who confided in me that she was doing prostitution because she considered finding a job retrogressive/pointless. She then asked me to go with her as a means to overcome my problems/needs).

Similarly, Emoni also spoke of how a friend directly influenced her decision to join prostitution.

*Emoni: Ndinakuma ndi mzanga wina akunena kuti 'ifetu timapita koyenda kumapeza thandizo ndi chifukwa chake umationa stimagwira nthito koma timathandizika tikaapita ku uhule. Ndiye ndi mene inenso ndinayimba. Ndinamuuza kuti utitenge madzulo.*

(I met a friend who told me that she was able to support herself through prostitution. So, I told her to take me with her when going out).

Likewise, Labani and Diami, in their respective accounts, talked of how they would go out with their friends to make money for leisure such as hosting parties and going out for drinks.

*Labani: Ndinakumana ndi azizanga oyendayenda omwewa. Timkapita ngati mu ma party, ticheza kumenekuja, kuyamba mowa chifukwa ndikamwa mowa uja ndimazimva kuti ndiribe stress kuganiza amai anga ndi zomwe amakumana nazo. Ndimazimva kuti ndikunjoya. Ndiye amzanga aja akandiwuza kuti tiyeni kwakuti tsiku lakuti, ndimapita nao. Tikafika kuja tiyamba kumwa mowa, ndiyeno amuna amatifuna ndikuyamba kunyengena nawo. Azanga aja anali atandiuza kale kuti akandifuna ndiziwauza kuti ndalama. Ndiye nthawi imeneyo nane ndimafuna ndalama ndi m'mene zinalili. Pena ndimagulira chimanga. Kenako basi nditengane nawo, kukagonana nawo basi andipase ndalama.*

(I had a group of friends who were doing prostitution. We used to organise night outs, drinking in order to stop thinking about what I was going through and my mother was destitute. While out partying, some men would approach me. My friends had already told me that if this happens, I had to charge them. Since I was also looking for money with how the situation was for me, I just accepted).

In addition to the influence that friends had on her, Labani's words touch on the sense of filial responsibility and her belief that she had to support her mother. We see that her goal was to earn

money that she could use to support herself with as well as her family. However, in Labani's account, the influence of her friends is also noticeable. The picture emerging is one of a complex mix of circumstances that create a need to earn, combined with factors that raise awareness of the potential of prostitution to earn a living and for some, a means to fulfil familial responsibilities.

Diami offered further evidence of the role that friends had in informing the decision she made.

*Diami: Ndiyeno tanzizanga tija tinayamba kunditenga, ndikumapita ku uhule. Ndiye amabwera kuti 'tiyenitu kwakuti'. Ndiye anditenga ine basi kundipitisa ku bala ina yake kumenekuja kumandiuza m'mene zinthu zimakhallira. Inenso basi kungolowelera moyo umeneuja*

(My friends would then come to pick me up and we would go out together. They would suggest places to go and take me to some pubs while telling me what and how to conduct myself while meeting clients. I then became reckless and started leading that lifestyle).

Like most participants, Labani explained she learned more about involvement and how to approach clients from her friends. When she started, she was unaware of the practice or how to conduct one's self in prostitution. She gained her knowledge from her friends. But in contrast to findings from studies in a wide range of settings (UNICEF, 2001a; Barnardo's, 2009), participants used the money they made from prostitution as they wished and were not drawn into meeting their friends' needs or demands. In this way, the influence of friends can be seen in

terms of ‘normalising’ prostitution as a way of earning a living, already adopted by other females act as role models to younger sisters and daughters.

#### **5.6.5 Rite of passage/*Chinamwali***

The rite of passage to mark adulthood from childhood also emerged during fieldwork as another key contributor to children and young people’s involvement in prostitution. But the connections are not straightforward and require a broad understanding of cultural norms in Malawi and how these are held in tension with ‘modernising’ forces including children’s rights to which the government of Malawi has declared a commitment.

While chronological age is not a central theme in determining the lifecourse, for most societies in Malawi, there are various practices in different communities to mark the rite of passage from one stage to another. In line with arguments that childhood, youth and adulthood are socially constructed concepts, the passage from childhood to adulthood has important connotations for a young woman’s (who may be identified as a child in legal terms) potential involvement in prostitution. To mark the passing of childhood to adulthood, some societies in Malawi organise initiation ceremonies such as *chinamwali*. This is often for girls and boys who have reached puberty. Marriage is emphasised as the place for those who are female where they will depend on men who are positioned as the primary breadwinners and providers for those they marry.

Writing in a very different context, Armitage (2012) illustrates how *youth (chinyamata)* can be considered an *in-between*, stage associated with expectations to partake in childhood roles as well as adult duties. This is the understanding that comes with *chinamwali/kumvinidwa* which

signifies adulthood while continuing to recognising aspects of childhood. Firstly, it is widely claimed that girls in Malawi are encouraged or expected to have sex or to find a man for marriage or who could provide for their needs at these initiation ceremonies to mark their rite of passage (Berman, 2011). This framing of adulthood, starting at puberty, leads to young women being encouraged to marry and/or have sex which in turn leads to early pregnancy. Becoming a mother cements wider perceptions of adulthood and young mothers are expected to care for themselves and their own children. In the absence of a father, in the case of pregnancy outside marriage, this leaves young mothers extremely vulnerable. Emoni explained her own position in relation to her daughter:

*Nthawi imene amakwatira anazapeza mwana ndiye ndinzamuuza kuti ine ndiri pa mavutonso ndiye ukandionjezere mwana wina, ndiye uzipita kumudzi.*

(Before marrying, she got pregnant so I told her to leave for my village of origin because I had problems and responsibilities of my own).

Emoni here describes her understanding of childhood (for girls) as a stage that ends with becoming pregnant, one marker of adulthood. This leads to the expectation that the young woman/girl child will assume responsibilities like an adult, being expected to cater for her own children. In this regard, the possibility of picturing sex work as the means to earning money to meet one's own needs or responsibilities becomes greater.

Initiation ceremonies at puberty imply a devaluing of education for girls. Despite government interventions to encourage school continuation, and return to school following childbirth, wider

societal norms continue to prioritise the roles of wife and mother. This leads to many young women dropping out of school early and their expected means of support is a man who will provide for them. While this drives many adolescents to settle for marriage, where the marriage fails through divorce or death, young mothers are left without any means to provide for themselves since they are without (advanced) formal skills training. While there are (limited) alternatives such as doing people's laundry, running a business, or working in other ways to earn money, despite on the basis of their limited skills and qualifications; prostitution was listed as the preferred choice among participants in this study.

*Diami: Ndiye ndinazapezeka ndapanga mistake ndikutenga mimba. Mkulu wanga uja atabwera anazapeza ndiri ndimimba. Ndiye anthu anamuuza kuti: 'iwe sumapanga zabwino chifukwa mwana umamusiya pakhomu opanda chilichose. Ine kumakhala ngati nkhoa yosochera chifukwa olo pakhomu ndimabweretsapo azimuna. Mpaka pakhomu ndimabweretsapo amuna, ena amandigulira zinthu ena kundipatsa ndalama.*

(My sister was often away for several weeks. I then became reckless, bringing men home. A mistake I made was when I became pregnant. The men could pay me in cash or just buy me various things).

Here, Diami raise several issues, some of which I have already touched on. But she was more concerned when she became pregnant, using the word *mistake*, as the pregnancy was not planned and without anyone to support her including the man who was responsible. This added more responsibility on her (as having the child meant she was an adult expected to provide for herself).



It was without surprise that after the baby was born Diami continued with the practice of selling sex.

Referring to unplanned pregnancy<sup>19</sup>, Diami also revealed one of the challenges that children and young people face by virtue of their involvement in prostitution - a significant chance of pregnancy-

With both prostitution and abortion being illegal in Malawi, those involved in prostitution are less able to access basic health care services including reproductive health. Diami also referred to the risks of giving birth at a young age explaining that, like her sister who also got pregnant through her involvement in prostitution, she had complications while giving birth because she was not physically mature. Those who become pregnant have little choice but to continue their pregnancy and take on the responsibilities of motherhood as has been the experience of all participants in this study except 12-year-old Loni.

### 5.6.5 Girls' Education Undervalued

*Buren: Nthawi imene ndimasiya sukulu nditayamba kale zaukhulukuzi. Ndinasiya chifukwa chazimenezi.*

(By the time I dropped out of school, I had already joined prostitution)

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<sup>19</sup> As stated in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), young mothers are often left to look after their babies without support, fathers often refuse to accept responsibility. Malawi has a weaker system to allow young mothers to demand support from the responsible fathers. Pregnancies outside marriage is also considered sinful and immoral, leading to very limited support from parents as the case of Emoni above reveals who sent her daughter to the village. Other parents also consider it to be the sole responsibility of their pregnant daughters to look after their own babies.

It is evident from the previous section that young girls are encouraged to consider marriage as their purpose in life which has resulted in limited commitment to the education of girls at community level. None of participants had reached an advanced stage of formal education post-secondary school. Only Babani, among all participants in the two areas had completed secondary education. None of the participants in District Y reached secondary education, while less than half of those in District X completed junior secondary school. Apart from Babani, all other participants dropped out of school early and none had a diploma or formal college training. As I will illustrate later, this made participants to have limited chances of alternative and better-paying employment.

Participants' poor educational attainment can be explained in two ways. There was one group whose involvement in prostitution led them to drop-out of school. But participants also referred to education and how they viewed the relationship between prostitution and education through photographs. Labani explained, using the Photo 20 below, that education increased career prospects but having quit school, opportunities for jobs were most likely limited to lower paid, cheap labour. In addition to explaining how poor education and qualifications meant limited opportunities, the participants showed why most of those involved in prostitution do not have a better educational base. As explained earlier, participants listed various socioeconomic challenges such as poverty as well as lack of support for both orphans and those who come from a poor background. Although basic primary education has been free in Malawi since 1994, participants explained that people are still asked to contribute towards school funds or uniforms with those who cannot afford not being allowed to attend classes, and going to school without eating was seen as a further deterrent for many others.



**Photo 20: Labani's photo of a car signifying success through education**

During one group discussion using a photo of a car that Labani had agreed to take with Umani and Mazani, they outlined how being educated could have changed their lives and why their continued involvement had resulted from poor education.

*Mazani: M'mene tinawonera ife kuti afike apa, zinali ngati sukulu*

(We think she reached to the point of buying that car because of school)

*Labani: Mwina anapita kusukulo komanso kuti mwina kwawo kuli ndalama ndiye anafika stage imeneyoyo. Ndiye tinakambirana kuti ifenso tikanakhala kuti kwathu chithandizo chinaliko chokwanira ndithu tikanapita kusukulu ndiye tinavomerezana kuti tikanatha kufika ngati point imeneyoyo*

(It is possible that she completed school or that she is coming from a privileged family.

Before taking this photo, we pondered on what could have happened if we also had gone further with school. Apparently, there was a consensus among us when this photo was being taken that only if we had all the support we needed, we could have reached her stage).

Bureni: *Ndiye upite usanadye ukamvako? Fees yokha payokha ndiyosafunikira. Fees, uniform, masiku ano kulibe school ya ulele*

(But going to school on an empty stomach would make it impossible for you to concentrate in class. There is currently no free school because you are expected to pay fees or have a school uniform).

Emoni: *ana ena akungokhala sakulowa mu class chifukwa chosawa ndalama ya school fund, zomwe zikumapangitsa ana kumangokhala. Uhule sukuyenda*

(Some pupils are unable to get into classes for failing to pay the school funds [that schools set and demand students to pay similar to tuition but are used for different projects by each school]. We currently are not earning much from prostitution).

Mazani: *ine mwana wanga sakupita. Masiku ano vakabo ikuvuta, akumabwera ndi asilikali, apolice ndi aprison. Akumayamba 9 koloko. Ndiye kubala sikukumapezeka anthu*

(My own child is just staying home. Clients are scared because the police are currently running night patrols<sup>20</sup>)

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<sup>20</sup> During the time of my fieldwork, Malawi used to have rogue and vagabond laws which gave power to the Police to arrest people loitering in the streets and public places at night. However, such patrols used to target women found at night; in which case, most were involved in prostitution. With these patrols, those engaged in prostitution would be scared to go to pubs.

Bureni: *makolo ndalama akayipeza akuthandizira pakhomopo kuti ana adye. Mwina apeze K500 ndiye akapelekenso ku sukulu, pakhomopo adya chain*

(You could hardly consider paying [school] fees first if you have only made K500<sup>21</sup>. One is more concerned to cater for the needs at the house than using all of it to pay fees<sup>22</sup>).

There were others who dropped out of school first before joining prostitution, the result of no support for fees, school uniforms, or food among other needs that would encourage children to remain in school. Most of the study participants belonged to this group and Labani explains further.

*Ndiye kenako ndinazakhala kuti phee, kuona kuti ndizipanga life imeyi mpaka liti?  
Komano kuti ndisiye ndiye nditani; sukulu sindinamalize bwinobwino, apa ndiye nditani?  
Ndiyeno ndinazakhala kuti apa ndiye ndalowelera. Zoti ndingapite kusukulu ndi ndalama momwe ndimazipezera sizingatheke. Chifukwa sindimapeza ndalama yokwanira; kuti ndibwererenso kwa sister wanga uja ndimmene anandipangira muja, sizogwira. Tinali titayambana. Ndiye ndinangoganiza zopita ku South Africa*

(I had a deep reflection on what I was doing. But then, what else could I have done. I could not quit neither could I go back to school with the money that I was earning. So, I just gave up knowing that what I was doing was awful).

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<sup>21</sup> About £0.50

<sup>22</sup> Special fee that each school sets and demands from pupils; without payment they can not access lessons.

Even being involved in prostitution, participants did not earn enough money to cater for their daily needs without even considering school related costs such as fees or uniforms. Diami explains how she dropped out of school:

*Diami: Nditasiya, anthu aja atasiya kundilipilira fees. Mkulu wanga ujanso amakanika kundilipilira*

(I had stopped school by the time I was staying with my sister. My grandparents had stopped paying my school fees. My sister could hardly afford it).

Without education, the risk of involvement in prostitution for children and young people becomes higher as opportunities for paid employment are extremely scarce. This has left some young people vulnerable to coercive invitations to certain jobs, for example becoming a maid, a situation that can easily expose girls and young women to abuse, a situation described as within the Capability Approach as constrained choices (Nussbaum, 2000, 2003) or what Bordonaro and Payne (2012) refer to as ambiguous agency. With limited escape routes from such abuse, prostitution easily becomes the next destination. And given the falsity of hopes that prostitution is a route to economic independence, mothers involved in prostitution find it difficult to support the education of their own children. With this, young people not involved in prostitution, their prospects for continuing in education are limited when living with another person, usually mother or older sibling, who is involved in prostitution. This more evident with the case of Diami who, prior to joining prostitution was living with her older sister who was a sex worker; as well, this was the case with Emoni's daughters.

Furthermore, as described in the earlier section on ‘Rite of passage/*Chinamwali*’ becoming pregnant constrains the possibilities of completing school education. While encouraged to settle for marriage or engage in sex and non-planned pregnancy, the young girls leave school with the assumption that the male figure will be providing for their daily needs. This mind set of dependency leaves them prone to domestic abuse, unprepared for employment to support themselves if the marriage fails through death or abuse leading to separation and divorce <sup>23</sup>. In such situations, not only does prostitution appear as a possible means of earning a living for these young *mothers*, but also, indirectly, for their daughters.

#### **5.6.6 Coercion, Trafficking and Pimps: Housemaids & the Rise of Child Bar Girls**

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<sup>23</sup> Most societies, being strongly patriarchal, use the adage that *banja ndikupilira* (marriage is founded on patience). This is often meant for the woman, encouraging her to be patient and resilient to their husband regardless of how violent or abusive they become.



**Photo 21: Loni's drawing of how she became involved in prostitution**

Loni: *Anabedwa*

(She was stolen<sup>24</sup>)

Despite most participants not placing their central focus on being control by pimps, examples were given showing that some children and young people in the two areas were clearly coerced, trafficked and/or forced into prostitution where they were being controlled by others. This sketch (Photo 21) of Chisk attests to this. It was drawn by Loni who had rescued herself from a brothel where she was being held. During the interviews<sup>25</sup> with her, had clearly wanted to leave but this

<sup>24</sup> See Loni's pen portrait (Pen Potrait 1).

<sup>25</sup> Given her age Loni did not join the main group discussions but was keen to particpat in the study. Instead, she engaged in visual activities and four shorter meetings to tell her story.



was not easy considering that it was her first time in a big city, located about an hour's drive away. She explained how her involvement came about, touching on some of the points raised earlier such as the role of friends and relatives.

*Loni: Anakumana ndi amai enaake omwe anamuuza kuti amafuna mtsikana watchito.*

*Anamuza Chisk kuti awafunire atsikanawo kapena akayambe iwo ntchitoyo. Chisk*

*atakana koma mzake ndiye anamupangitsa. Akadakhala yekha akanakana*

(Chisk met this woman who told her that she was looking for a maid. The woman asked Chisk to take up the position or help to find the girls looking for such jobs. Chisk turned down the offer saying she could not manage. However, her friend convinced her to accept the woman's offer. If she were there alone, she could have refused. However, it was her friend who convinced her. She was manipulated and lied to that they would return home the following day).

Loni had been at the brothel for over 6 months. She was controlled through threats, intimidation and manipulation including deprivation of food. Like with the case of Chisk, the character that Loni used, or Loni herself, some examples were drawn (particularly by participants in District X) highlighting coercion or the intra-country trafficking of young girls for prostitution. It was stated that there was an increased in the number of young girls being recruited by pubs as bar girls<sup>26</sup>.

*Mpalini: Kakhalidwe akoko pano kayamba kukula, kakukulirakulira. Ana aja*

*akumatengedwa. Komanso kamchitidwe kavvmeneko kakhala kakuchitika chifukwa olo*

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<sup>26</sup> In Malawi, it is commonly understood that bar girls also sell sex to clients patronising such bars.

*mwini wache wa bala lamuKoma amapita kukatenga tiatsikana ting'onoting'ono kuti  
azikhala ngati amu balamo...Amawa uza kuti akawalemba ntchito koma pochokapo  
samaziwa kuti ntchito yake ndi yotani*

(The practice of recruiting children is currently on increasing. Koma bar owner, for example, visits different rural areas where he recruits younger girls to work for him without disclosing the nature of the work).

In District Y, participants also described young women being *pushed* into prostitution by their husbands.

*Iviana: Amuna ena amachita kumuuza mkazi kuti pita kubala; olo kutengana banja lonse;  
tengana ndi mwamuna uyo; iye: ndikubwera kaye ndikazisake kaye; akabwera umva  
ndigayile Mk50 or MK100 nane ndigule mowa, iye kumugulira mowa*

(There are some husbands who push their wives to go to the bar so they can ask her to share the money she earns and he would ask for K50 or K100 to buy beer. Others even go to the extent of accompanying her there.)

With labour laws and practices that are rarely monitored or executed, children and young people, particularly girls, are commonly employed as housemaids. This provides pub owners with an opportunity to employ young girls on the pretence that they would be working as waiters or maids. Reports of people from the city going to villages to employ girls are well known in Malawi. Like Loni, other participants touched on this aspect of involvement.

*Mpaseni: Amapezeka oti mwini wake wabala kukatenga atsikana. Amangoyenda mumakomo mwa anthu kuwatenga, mumamizi mosiyanasiyana. Amangowanamiza tiyeni muzikagwira nthito kunyumba kwanga olo kumarestolanti. Kukafika kuja akapeza ntchito ndi imeye, ena akasangalatsidwa nawo amajoyina, ena ayi, samajoyina. Amawauwauza kuti inuyo mukamanyengedwa ndalama ndizirandira ndi neyo, inuyo ndizikulipirani pakutha mwenzi. Kuwaphuzitsa kusuta chamba*

(There are some girls who are deceived with promises that they will be working as maids or ushers at a restaurant only to be told that they will be working in prostitution. The pub owners tell them that he will be collecting money from the clients and that they would be paid on monthly basis. Those who are interested stay and at times even taught to take drugs (smoke marijuana).

But as Mpalini detailed when she was talking about two girls who were being pimped by a brothel owner, it is only on rare occasions that such children and young people get their monthly pay as promised. This is the aspect that concerned the participants who touched on this, lending further support to the ‘normalisation’ of the transanctional sex argument outlined earlier in this chapter.

*Mpalini: Akanakhala kuti akuwapasa ndalama sibwenzi palivuto sinanga ndalamayo bwenzi akuthandizikira.*

(It wouldn’t have been an issue if the girls were being given the money which they could have used to support themselves in times of need).

Loni herself touched on this:

*Sanatiuze kuti azitipasa ndalama zingati. Tinazindikira titafika ukoko. Titafika anatiuza kuti tidule mowa. Ndinali ndi mantha komanso manyazi. Koma anandiuza kuti ngati sindizidula mowawo ndiye kuti sindizidya. Anthu amanditchula kuti mwana dala*

(We were not informed in advance of the nature of the work or how much we would be getting. We were only told upon arrival to start opening beer for people. I was very shy and nervous. But they said I will not be getting food if I insisted on not working.

Non-payment was raised by other participants who also negotiated with clients themselves.

In addition, Loni's account of Chisk as well as interviews with Mpalini and Umani, showed that not only were girls huddled in overcrowded rooms, but they would undergo an orientation where they were told that only those selling sex would be given food.

*Umani: Anawauza mukamagona ndi amuna ndizikusungirani ndalama ndizikupasni pamodzi ndi K5000 yomwe anagwalizana komanso samawapansa. Koma sinanga wangayo anali wang'ono, amangomugwiragwira mabele basi amupase K500 or K200 chifukwa amati ndi wang'ono. Ndiye amakawapasa abwana ake aja. Amuna ena akakumana naye, zikakhala kuti zikukanika akayesera kugona naye, amangomasa ndalama kuti asamusiye chomcho. Ndalama ija amakawapasa abwana aja koma mwezi ukatha samawapsa. Chosencho chakudya amadya chawonso osati abwana awowo*

(The brothel owners told them that she would be keeping both their monthly perks which was K5000 as well as the money from prostitution. The men would just grope my daughter because she was very young and give her K500 or K200. There were others who would try to force themselves on her but it just could not work. She would then hand her money that she had been given to the brothel owner. Yet, they were not being given food; the girls had to buy their own food).

Inducing fear of deprivation of basic needs was a common way through which girls would be forced to engage in sexual acts. Being in a location where they hardly knew anyone, the possibility of seeking alternative support was removed. The only option was to build resilience by attempting to cope with what they were faced with. For Loni, this meant giving in to what Soldier (the male brothel owner) wanted of her as well as embracing the demand to sleep with clients. Loni stated that she had not wanted to engage in the practice as she experienced sex as painful but men would force themselves on her. She expressed being appalled by how she was *forced* to sell sex by her captors. In addition to being in an unfamiliar location, she was intimidated and instilled with fear upon her arrival that there was no opportunity to refuse to engage in prostitution or leave the brothel.

*Loni: Ndimaopa mwakuti sindimakana akandituma chinthu. Azawo amawatchula kuti a soldier. Ati anapha msilikali ndipo anamangidwa kwa zaka 30 koma anachita kuthawa. Anali oopsa. Akandiyitana, ndimagwana.*

(I was afraid of the owner who his friends called Soldier. Some said he was given a 30-year jail sentence for murder but he managed to break out of prison. I thus would just submit to whatever he said).

Umani also alluded to this while explaining how Loni and other girls at the brothel would be kept away from being seen by those who were suspected to be police officers.

*Akawona wapolice or galimoto yapolice ikuubwera, abwana awo aja amawasekera ku room kwawo mpaka a police aja apita*

(They would lock the girls every time they saw a police officer).

There was a general consensus among participants that despite not all children and young people being coerced into prostitution, the younger the girls, the higher the risk of coercion or manipulation. It also emerged that once involved, children and young people were at a higher risk of being required by clients to have unprotected sex as they could not always negotiate or be in control as regards to how they engaged with client.

## **5.7 Summary**

This chapter has presented key sets of findings to provide a basis for analysis, in the following chapter, of how and why children in Malawi engage in prostitution and how social, economic, political and cultural issues influence and shape children and young people's involvement. Data have been drawn from a range of methods allowing individual experiences and shared reflections on experiences to come to the foreground. The immediate message from the findings

is that engagement and continuing involvement in prostitution are associated with a number of factors which overlap and are interconnected, with no single factor alone explaining engagement or involvement. These are:

- absence of family support, through orphanhood or extreme poverty;
- identifying a means of survival after escaping an abusive relationship, particularly following early marriage;
- knowing others who are already involved in prostitution and the normalisation of prostitution;
- poor level of educational attainment that limits alternative means of earning sufficient income for survival;
- Being coerced, trafficked or controlled.

In the following chapter I offer further analysis and interpretation of the findings in the light of the literature and the theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER SIX: MAKING SENSE OF CHILD PROSTITUTION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I start by addressing the second research question of this thesis that asks how participants have understood their own involvement in, and experiences of, prostitution. In the second section I develop my own critical analysis of why and how children and young people in Malawi engage in prostitution drawing together: i) the participants' own understandings, ii) the social, economic, political and cultural factors that shape the context of the study (outlined in Chapter Two), and iii) the theoretical underpinnings of the study presented in Chapter Three.

The argument addresses why and how participants engage in prostitution (RQ1); how they make sense of their engagement in and experiences of prostitution (RQ2) and how social, economic, political and cultural structures, as well as circumstances emerging as a result of these structural factors, shaped involvement and experiences of involvement (RQ3). Throughout the chapter, I make reference to existing theoretical perspectives and argument on child prostitution to understand and explain children and young people's involvement in prostitution, creating a space to develop a nuanced and multi-dimensional theoretical explanation for understanding child prostitution in Malawi, the overall purpose of this thesis.

### **6.2. Participants' Own Understanding of Engagement, and Experiences of Involvement, in Prostitution**

In this section, I focus on how participants made sense of their own engagement in and experiences of prostitution. Throughout the section, I make reference to different theoretical



perspectives: the children's rights approach, radical and liberal feminist perspectives, structure and agency debates, and lastly, the Capability Approach. Participants offered an interconnected, multi-dimensional overview of their involvement and I pay close attention to how participants viewed themselves and their own accounts of their experiences of involvement.

All participants showed awareness of the circumstances and conditions that made involvement in prostitution a plausible decision. But they were largely unaware of the broader structural factors that gave rise to the circumstances and conditions that directly influenced their decisions<sup>27</sup> to engage in prostitution. They described their involvement in prostitution as a means of coping, managing and overcoming the circumstances in which they found themselves in. These included surviving by earning money to cover their own basic needs, as well as their children's and in some cases in fulfilling wider filial obligations. I pay close attention to Loni's story that, as an exception, clearly demonstrates the importance of developing a multi-dimensional theoretical understanding of involvement in prostitution.

In the following section I start by focusing on participants as active agents, who became involved in prostitution as a means of overcoming a range and combination of circumstances threatening their survival.

### **6.2.1 *Kuutsanza Mtima*: Participants as Active Agents Engaging in Prostitution: A Means of Overcoming Circumstances and Conditions**

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<sup>27</sup> With the exception of Loni who was trafficked, all participants exercised agency in their decision to engage in prostitution

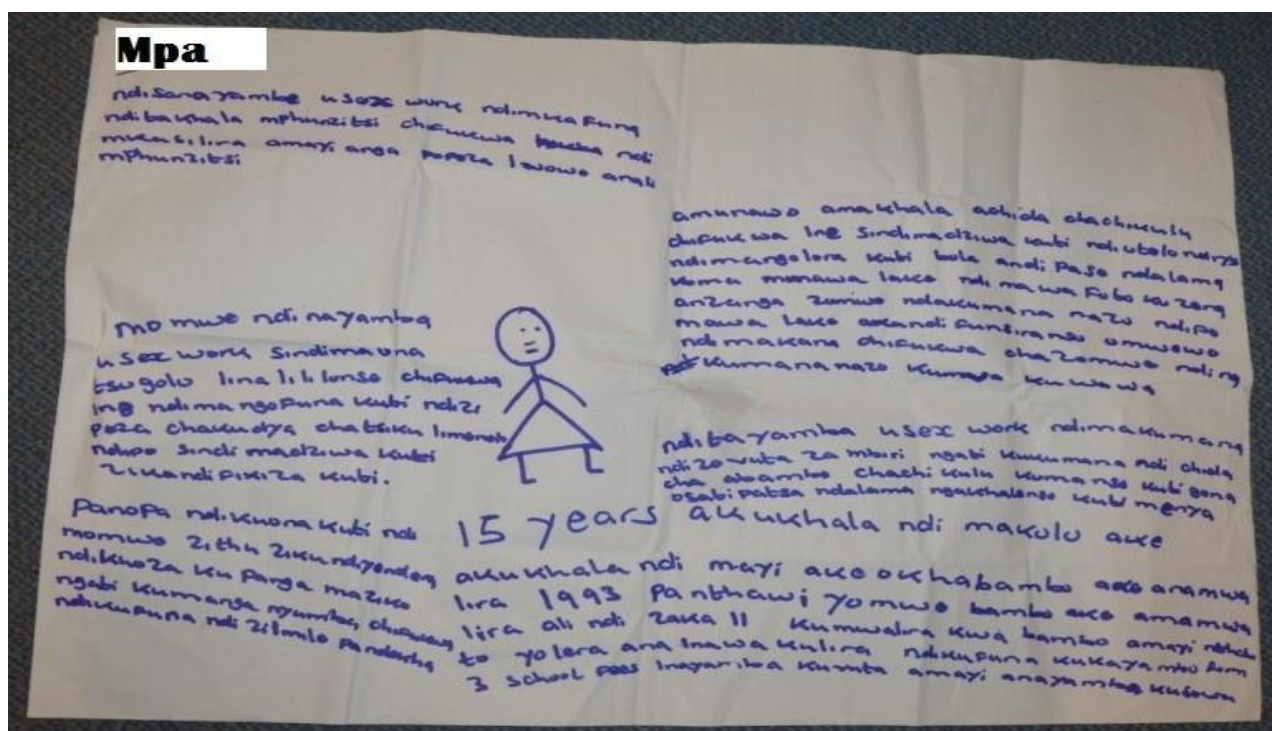


Photo 22: Mpaseni's sketch

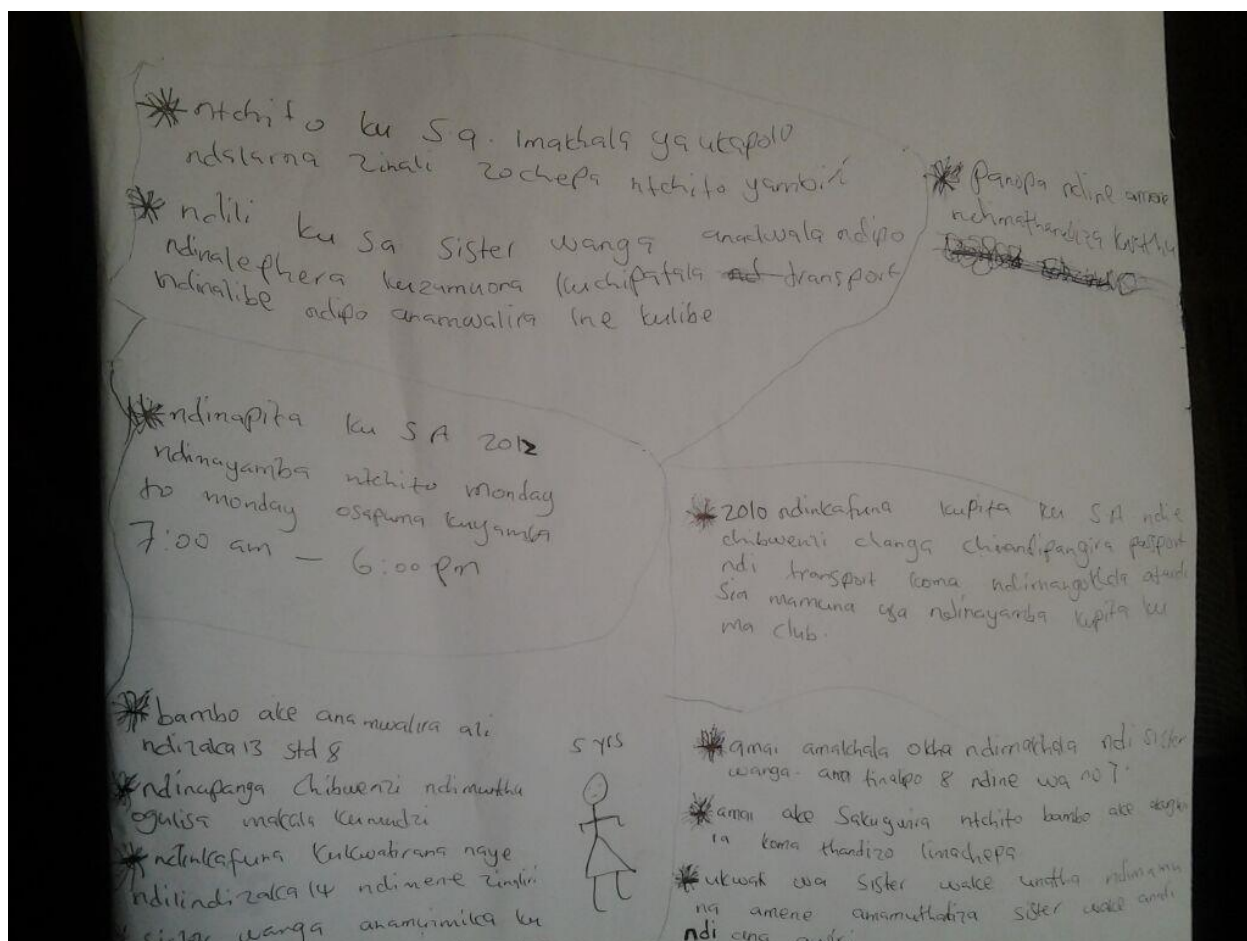
As is evident in the findings presented in Chapter Five, participants viewed themselves as active agents and their involvement as an outcome of their own decisions. All participants expressed awareness of the circumstances and conditions that pushed them into prostitution. Involvement was a means of survival, a way of coping with, managing or overcoming: extreme poverty, orphanhood, escaping violent marriages or abusive substitute family care, or the absence of a primary breadwinner – particularly important for those who were heads of households. Mpaseni's annotated sketch (Photo 22 above) indicates that she lost her father when she was 11 which made it difficult for her mother to raise all the children. Poverty was the primary factor pushing her into prostitution and the prospect of earning money to satisfy basic needs was her primary motivation.

With the exception of Loni whose route into prostitution was different, all participants, despite their ‘rational’ choices to engage in prostitution, also saw themselves as victims of circumstances. Some had considered prostitution a preferable means of survival over marriage to a violent husband. And in the absence of educational qualifications, employment, or the development of an income generating project, that allowed the possibility of earning a living wage seemed impossible. Only one participant had finished secondary school with more than half having dropped out while still at primary school. In the face of these circumstances, the decision to engage in prostitution speaks to the key elements of theoretical argument informing the relationship between structure and agency. In this situation, participants had made decisions while still children, and in the face of their circumstances, to engage in prostitution. What is clear, however, is that their choices were constrained, with alternative directions seeming to be less preferable than engaging in prostitution.

While participants saw themselves as victims of circumstances that pushed them towards prostitution, they did not perceive their involvement *per se* as victimhood or as a form of sexual abuse, despite their initial involvement having occurred during their childhoods. The suggestion here is that the children’s rights approach that equates children’s involvement in sexual activity as sexual abuse has little power in developing an understanding of child prostitution in Malawi.

Throughout the period of fieldwork, participants were particularly interested in showing how they exercised agency both in making decisions to engage in prostitution in an attempt to improve their well-being, and in responding to different sets of circumstances (such as death of a primary breadwinner through death or separation) that emerged at different stages of

involvement. This was particularly evident in the manner they described, and emphasised, the circumstances that made engaging in prostitution a plausible action to take. Most of these circumstances - extreme poverty, orphanhood, escaping violent marriages or abusive substitute family care, or the absence of a primary breadwinner – were rooted in deeper structural factors of which participants were either unaware or which they did not question. They emphasised *kuutsanza mtima* which conveys decision making as a matter of personal choice depending on the circumstances of the individual. In this way, involvement in prostitution was consistent with the structure and agency argument whereby, within a set of uncontrollable structures, active, if constrained, choices (Ennew, 2008), were made to engage in prostitution.



**Photo 23: Labani: From material to survival needs**

With involvement in prostitution framed as a personal decision, engaging in prostitution was not limited simply to survival. Labani's storyboard (Photo 23), shows how her reasons for engaging and continuing her involvement in prostitution changed. Her initial involvement was to earn money to be able to participate in social activities. However, i) with the death of her sister who had become the primary breadwinner, ii) following the death of their father, and loss of their home as a result of customary inheritance laws, iii) she took over the primary breadwinner role that had been assumed by her sister. Here, we see a set of changing circumstances and changing responsibilities to which Labani responded, making conscious decisions. Her storyboard also

reveals her efforts to engage in alternatives such as migrating to South Africa where she worked as a house-girl. However, following the experience of what she described as *ukapolo* (slavery), she returned to Malawi where prostitution became the only practicable way of sustaining herself and her family. Like other participants, Labani had not progressed beyond primary school due to lack of support for fees at secondary school, and explained: *Ndiye pamenepaja ndinangoti nanga nditani* (what else could I have done?). Labani's story of involvement and the circumstances that led her into prostitution were not unusual and other participants involved in group discussions described their involvement as either a means of survival or as a strategy of coping and managing the circumstances in which they found themselves. While extreme poverty was a fundamental and common experience, this was exacerbated by other factors such as: early marriage and pregnancy, limited engagement in formal education, absence of the primary breadwinner through separation or death as well as absence of supportive substitute family care.

At the time of engaging with participants in this research, all were engaging in prostitution for survival. But for some, survival was not the primary factor associated with their initial involvement. This situation applied to those who, on engaging with prostitution as adolescent children, still had parents who could manage to meet basic needs. But with the level of household poverty for such families, material needs were not always covered as parents were more focused on meeting livelihood needs. The attraction of prostitution in these circumstances arose from the image of prostitution conveyed by others within their social network who were already involved, and was considered as a pragmatic way to meet material needs.

Once drawn into prostitution participants faced a heightened the risk of pregnancy. In the context of social norms that equate parenthood with adulthood and adulthood with responsibility, having a child, even as a child, marks a shift from being a child whose parents bear responsibility, to being an adult who must bear responsibility for one's own needs and that of the child. This is evident in Emoni's description of her own daughters, one of whom became pregnant and was told to leave for the home village to live with her grandmother. The grandmother relies on subsistence farming. This clearly leaves the daughter with the need to seek ways to support herself as well as her child as well as have the sense of filial duty to support the grandmother in periods where support is inadequate. In such circumstances, adolescent girls found themselves in a position of having to consider ways of sourcing basic means of support in order to survive. Thus, even for participants who were drawn into prostitution principally to source the means to satisfy social expectations of friends or personal attraction to 'trending' fashion or social activities, the risks associated with involvement, including pregnancy, all too easily led to prolonged involvement.

Even Loni, the youngest and only participant who described her involvement as constituting abuse and exploitation in the manner of the children's rights approach, showed signs of agency at different levels of her involvement. While she was trafficked (tricked into prostitution under the pretence of the offer of a job as a maid and then coerced and controlled), the circumstances leading up to her engagement in prostitution, her search for a means of survival, is consistent with structure and agency explanations of prostitution). It was her quest for survival that resulted in her direct contact with her traffickers and the people who then controlled her. Without denying the way in which she was manipulated, that speaks to the children's rights explanation that all

sexual activity with children amounts to child abuse, it is the Capability Approach that offers a more satisfactory explanation of the manner in which her circumstances can be understood. Loni was in search of a means to take greater control over her circumstances and develop the possibility of living a valuable life. Yet, if the promise of the job as a maid had materialised, just like prostitution, this would also have removed Loni's opportunity to return to school and may have exposed her to other forms of victimisation and 'slavery' as Labani's experience of working as a maid has demonstrated. Loni's agency is evident when she arrived in District Y, her decision to engage in selling sex for survival and the need for money for her day-to-day needs even though: i) it is clear that prostitution was not what she had anticipated when she left istrict X; and ii) she was faced with the threat of being deprived of food if she refused. In the section that follows, I place particular focus on Loni who, as her pen-portrait portrays, fits the common conception of child prostitution. Her situation, therefore, offers an important illustration of the strengths and weaknesses of the children's rights approach in understanding child prostitution.

### **Pen Portrait 1: Loni**

LONI, aged 12, was the youngest participant. She was one of six children of an older participant, Eumi, who was unable to pay school fees for all her children and Loni had dropped out of primary school because of the challenges in raising school fees. Together with a 13-year-old friend, Loni was lured to the city believing she was going to a paid job as a housemaid. But instead she found herself trafficked to a brothel.

At first understanding that she was to serve beer, she learned she was also expected to sleep with clients who were willing to pay for sex. The penalty for refusing was withholding food and pay being withheld. The brothel owner exercised further control using threats of violence by her husband, a former soldier and convicted murderer who had escaped from prison. While in the brothel, Loni experienced violence and abuse, being stabbed by a potential client who



resented her explanation that she had been abducted and was not old enough to have sex. She sustained severe physical injuries resulting from multiple rape as clients attempted to achieve penetrative sex; and exposed her to further risk through insistence on unprotected sex.

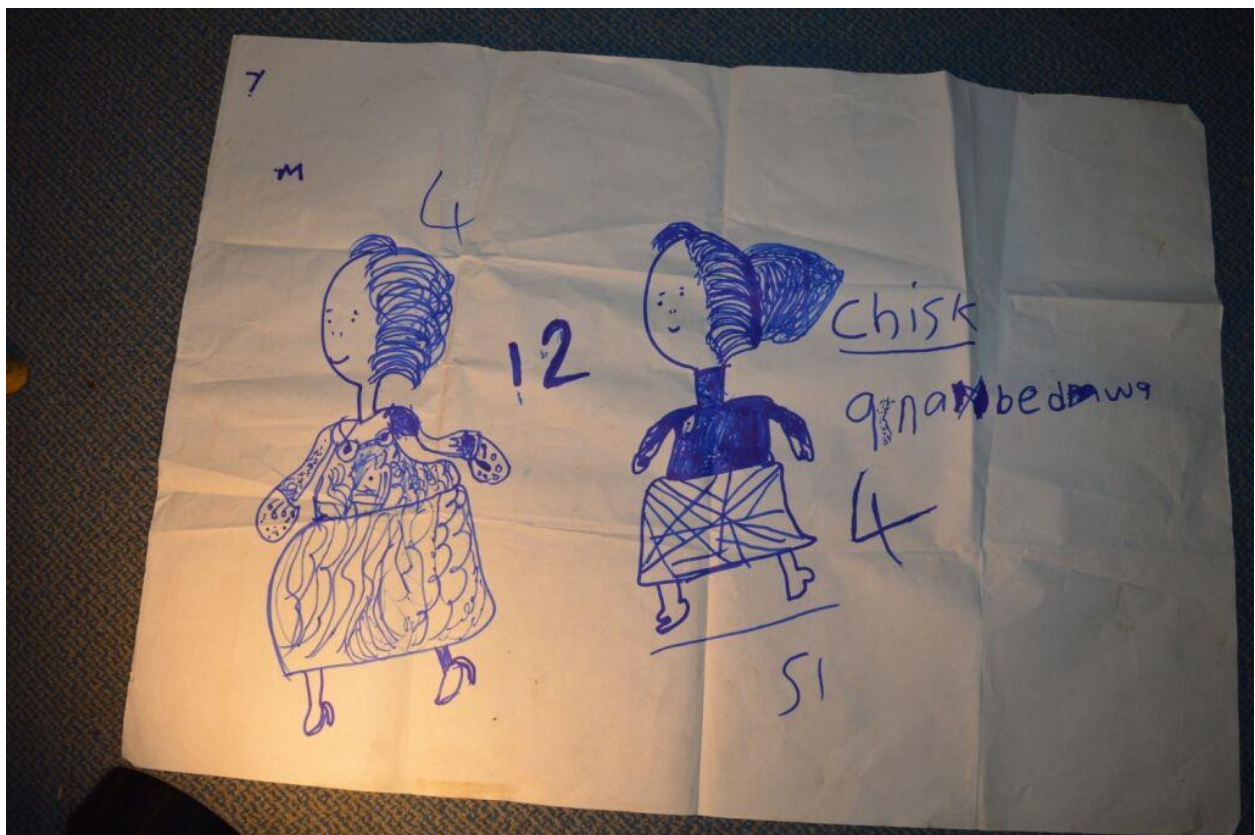
Speaking in the third person to describe the experiences of the figure she drew to represent herself, Loni referred to clients' particular interest in her as being young: they knew she was a child as she hadn't even developed breasts.

A possible opportunity to escape, when police raided the brothel to arrest sex workers, was foiled by the brothel owner's husband who locked her in a room and told the police she had returned to her village. Despite the risks of punishment by the brothel owner, Loni planned her escape, and used money she saved to return to her family in District X. Her friend with whom she had been trafficked was seriously ill and Loni was unable to escape with her. On reaching the village their mothers learned of their experiences and went to the Police despite not having reported their earlier disappearance. This resulted in the arrest of the brothel owner who was charged with child abduction, child trafficking and child labour. But with a two-hour journey to the court and only very limited support from an NGO to attend, Loni and her mother faced significant barriers in securing any form of justice.

As discussed earlier, Loni was the only participant to describe her experiences of involvement in terms of abuse and victimhood, the result of being trafficked to District Y where she was then threatened and controlled. Furthermore, she narrated how she was hurt by clients attempting penetrative sex. Loni's view was that clients were clearly interested in her because of her 'young appearance', and she was often referred to by them and the brothel owner, as *mwana dala* which translates literally as *child-deliberately* implying that she was either viewed as an adult or mature enough for sex despite her appearance – she had not yet developed breasts - giving a clear indication that she was sexually immature '*asanathe msinkhu*' and still a child. She said: "*ndinapita ndilibe mabele*" (I did not have breasts when I went there). In most societies across

Malawi puberty and sexual maturity are marked by the growth of breasts signalling it is time to undergo rites of passage in readiness for marriage and adulthood.

Two important points emerge from Loni's story. First, it is evident that she saw herself as a victim, and prostitution as abusive, in the manner that child prostitution is discussed within the dominant discourse in accordance with the children's rights approach. While referring to Chisk (Photo 24), through a sketch that she used to talk of her own involvement, she used the phrase *anabwedwa*, meaning stolen against her will.



**Photo 24: Anabedwa – stolen against her will**

But she illustrated agency throughout her involvement despite this victimhood. Her agency can further be traced prior to her trafficking, to the actual circumstances that heightened her risk to being coerced and then trafficked. Loni came from a poor, single mother headed-household and her mother was also involved in prostitution. But, as I have briefly outlined and will illustrate further in the following section, involvement in prostitution further constrained participants' opportunities to pursue alternative means of survival. Loni also had five siblings, which made it difficult for her mother to cater for all basic and non-basic needs from her own earnings from prostitution. As a result, Loni (who was then 11) and her 13-year-old friend, decided to embark on a quest to seek alternative ways they could find to meet basic needs which included seeking job opportunities. But without any educational qualifications, and being too young to meet the standards for employment in the formal job-market, the only opportunities open to them were working as maids or other jobs that attracted extremely low wages. This search for work brought them into contact with the trafficker who promised them a good paying job in the city.

Loni's story develops to show elements of hope but also elements of control and abuse. While in District X, she was obliged to work as a bargirl, serve clients alcohol and sex. This was the only way that she could eat and live. As stated in chapter five, her friends told her: *Iwenso ulinapo pomwe ife tikupangira ndalama za chakudya* (which literally translates to: You also possess what we are using to earn money for food). This led her to the realisation that unless she also engaged in prostitution, there was no way she could find food. But she was expected to hand her earnings to the brothel owner who explained that she would provide food and 'save' Loni's earnings for her to receive at the end of her contract. The end of the contract had been explained as being

whenever Loni and her friend wanted to return home, although it became clear to Loni very quickly after their arrival that this was not the case.

Loni was made to feel even more afraid when she was informed that her boss was a convicted criminal allegedly for murder but had managed to break out of prison. He was described as a soldier – a title that signifies power and a reputation for bullying civilians (Malawi24, 2016). All these factors: being in a strange place, without food and knowledge of how she could go back to District Y, played a part in her decision, in order to survive, to ‘obey’ or conform to the demands of the circumstances she found herself in.

Loni also recounted the horror of encounters with some clients who forced themselves on her. She showed the scars where she had been ‘slashed’ by blades clients had used and recalled times she was gang raped. She repeated: “*Anthu aku District X ndilibe nao mau, ndioopsa. Ndinaziwona. Sindimakufunanso*” (I am petrified of the people in District X. I don’t want to be there again. My experiences there were horrific). And, Loni talked further of her fear when, after escaping, returning home and going to the Police with her mother, she was asked to support the Police to help rescue her friends, saying: *Ndinali ndi mantha* (I was afraid)

Despite these traumatic experiences, Loni still expressed the view that prostitution could have been an acceptable route to survival if she had not been so young, but like her friend or the other girls she found at the brothel: *Iyeyo anali wamkulu, anali ndimabele pomwe enawo anali ndi ana. Mwana ndinali ndekha* (My friend was old/an adult. She had breasts while the other girls there had babies. I was the only young child/girl). On one hand, Loni’s description conveys

victimhood, sexual and emotional abuse. Yet, the context in which she describes the nature of her abuse and exploitation goes beyond the explanations offered by the children's rights discourse (Barnardo's, 2009; Alonso, 2014) and invites an examination of the impact of the abusive behaviour on her 'capabilities' or expressed more simply, her opportunity and ability to achieve valued outcomes in the context of her personal characteristics and circumstances. Loni's decision to actively seek a means of survival was influenced by her reduced capabilities as one of five siblings of a single mother living in poverty. She explained: *Sindikanapangira mwina* (I could not do otherwise). Her actions illustrate that she was not a passive victim but rather exercising agency with the intention of achieving a desired outcome. But, even after her escape from the brothel, her capabilities remained extremely limited.

Although Loni was the only participant to describe her experiences of prostitution as directly abusive, her descriptions of abusive behaviour, by clients and by those controlling her, have elements in common with the stories of the older participants who described their experiences in terms of exploitation, discussed in more detail in the following section. They did not, however, express their experiences in terms of the age and gender dichotomies of child sexual abuse (children's rights) or sex work (the liberal feminist perspective of prostitution).

A final theoretical insight emerging from Loni's story that she herself pinpoints, is the patriarchal framing and sexual objectification of young girls - *mwana dala* - set within the radical feminist discourse to describe the ways in which prostitution involved treatment as a sexual object.

### 6.2.2 Participants as Victims and Prostitution as Exploitation

From the previous section, we see that participants viewed themselves as active agents and their involvement as an outcome of *kuutsanza mtima* (personal choice depending on circumstances) an indication of agency. Much as they viewed themselves, or described their involvement in prostitution, in this manner, participants also described the contexts in which they considered involvement in prostitution as constituting exploitation or viewed themselves as victims. This perspective was central in participants' accounts of the different experiences they endured as a result of involvement in prostitution. It is, however, clear that none of the participants except Loni (as discussed in the previous section) considered themselves solely as victims of sexual abuse as a result of engaging in prostitution. They neither considered their involvement in prostitution as constituting exploitation by virtue of their age when they first engaged in prostitution nor, necessarily, as sexual objectification by virtue of their gender. Nonetheless, their stories alluded to age and gender throughout, shedding light on the contradictions and complexities of child prostitution, and undermining the power the unidimensional children's right approach. As Emoni explained in presenting one of the problem trees:

*Ndajambulawu ndi mtengo wa mango. Ulibe masamba chifukwa cha zokhoma zomwe ndimakumana nanzo pomwe ndimayamba monga kungogonedwa ulele. Ndiye phindu lopita ku mseu panalibe... Amunanso ena ovuta amakana kugwiritsa ntchito condom.*

(This mango tree does not have leaves to capture the hardship that I passed through when I was just starting. Men would just have sex and leave without paying. My involvement then was just hopeless. Even though it is not as frequent, other clients refuse to use a condom).

Like Emoni, Diami also illustrated through her storyboard (Photo 25) how she met a client, and negotiated with him only to be violently raped. She described this as something she had not consented to. He left without paying which was going against the arrangement that she had initially made for going out with him. She also recalled a moment when she fled an attempt on her life by another client. Through these accounts, the image of prostitution that cuts across all theoretical positions discussed in Chapter three emerges.



**Photo 25 Diami's storyboard**

Diami's storyboard, in revealing women's lack of power to renegotiate with clients, illustrates the hegemonic position that their clients occupy as men. Referring to her storyboard (Photo 25)

Diami explained how she was nearly killed by a client: “*kukhala ngati kugwilidwa kuja*” (in a manner that felt like I was being raped). Gender based violence was further discussed as being submerged within male hegemony where participants explained that clients could only be violent if: *iweyo wamuyamba mwamunayo* (Client cannot be violent or abusive unless you instigate it) a term Jobani used to refer to abusive clients. But she challenged the notion of *banja ndikupilira, mwamuna ndi chocho* (that’s how men are) which implies an acceptance of cultural practices that oblige women to submit to their ‘owners’, their husbands/men. This view chimes with feminist explanations of the peripheral position that women occupy, and continue to be obliged to occupy, in patriarchal societies. Talking to her storyboard, Diami illustrated that engaging in prostitution, the result of constrained choices, did not always help participants to achieve what they had aimed for by becoming involved. Rather, the participants ‘capabilities’ - opportunities and abilities to lead the lives they valued - were further constrained since their well-being was reliant not only on any money they earned from prostitution, but also on the way in which clients treated them.

Exercising agency participants were able to put in place some measures to limit such abusive experiences. But it was clear that their ability to prevent and resist abusive behaviour could never be assured. As set out within the feminist perspectives, the participants’ involvement and/or experience of prostitution was largely reliant on how male clients behaved and conducted themselves with girls and women involved in prostitution. Interestingly, participants likened their position to that of married women and housewives, indicating an awareness of the wider impact of male hegemony within marriage as well as within prostitution.

While taking measures to limit abusive behaviour offers another indication of participants’ agency, an exclusive focus on agency can result in disregarding the impact that experiences of



abusive behaviour can have on girls and women engaged in prostitution. Here, the Capability Approach offers a more nuanced understanding, drawing attention not only to the motives or circumstances that lead actors to behave in certain ways (for example showing resilience as part of wider efforts for survival) but also to the actual impact of those circumstances, and behaviours, that can affect well-being. The importance of these insights is that they offer a greater chance of identifying appropriate ways of intervening at the point of entry into prostitution (that is addressing the specific circumstances that drive women into prostitution) and of offering effective support to those who are already entangled within the circumstance/actions - i.e., factors that make involvement the reasonable choice and the actual involvement in prostitution).

### Pen Portrait 2: Mpaseni

MPASENI, 39, did not remember precisely how old she was when she first got involved in prostitution. She had 13 siblings and her father died at a very young age. Her father's relatives grabbed all the property her father had left in her mother's possession. This left them destitute because her mother was a housewife without any qualification or professional skills. For survival, Mpaseni settled for street begging with her mother which saw them walk several hours a day from her maternal village in one district to District Y to beg. Her mother passed away three years later.

Soon after, Mpaseni married a street vendor, a decision she made because marriage was the quickest means of support that she lacked. Her husband was the primary breadwinner. Together they moved to City X where he died of AIDS, leaving Mpaseni with two daughters to look after; yet, without a sustainable means to earn an income.

Mpaseni has three children, the last born through prostitution. Her daughters know she is involved in prostitution, which has made them a target of ridicule by their friends. Her children also engage

in casual work due to limited support which she said may lead them into prostitution. She fears that her own involvement and example may also lead her daughters, against her advice, to take up prostitution.

Prior to joining prostitution, Mpaseni started undertaking *maganyu* (casual jobs) such as doing people's laundry and working as a maid. But the income she earned through these activities was not enough to meet all her daily needs to the extent that they spent some days without food. It was then that she was introduced and oriented to prostitution by her friend, a sex worker. She described her friend as having well-wishing intentions. Her friend had once supported her with money and food. Mpaseni used to wear some of her friend's clothes while going out at night when she was first engaging in prostitution. Even with her involvement, her income has not improved and she combines prostitution with working as a guard at one of the hotels in city X. She explained that she could not quit [prostitution] because she does not earn enough income from either job.

Mpaseni has tested HIV positive. She meets clients who demand unprotected sex but she tells them about her HIV status. She is currently looking at alternative ways of generating income to be able to leave prostitution. Commenting on the poor prospects of prostitution in the future, Mpaseni also drew attention to the increased recruitment of children and young people to prostitution in the local pubs.

There was consensus among participants that involvement in prostitution made them vulnerable to various risks to their health including HIV and AIDS, interpersonal violence as well as the fear of what they were likely to endure through continued involvement. Diami recalled how one of her frequent clients used his 'financial power' to make her submit to his wish for unprotected sex without telling her of his HIV status. This situation left her anxious about her own HIV status, her own future and that of her daughters. And this reflected common experiences among participants who were fearful of the implications of their own involvement even though they owned their decisions to engage in prostitution. Like the other participants, Diami only continued

with prostitution as an adaptive means for her survival and a means through which she could support her children. Participants like Zani and Mpaseni (Pen Portrait 2) had been diagnosed as HIV positive as had Loni's 13-year-old friend. Knowing how difficult it was to find money for food, they exercised further agency in deciding not to declare their status to clients who insisted on having unprotected sex. As Zani explained in a group discussion: *Iye akulimba mtima chifukwa chani? Zake izo* (That is his own responsibility for demanding unprotected sex). However, for Loni, she said much as she could not tell whether clients were using condoms with her or not, unprotected sex was something she never considered. *Sungaziwe kuti wagona ndi angati ndipo kuti alibe matenda* (you cannot tell how many girls he has slept with). But she knew how little she could be control even with the measures she had put in place.

Another form of power that clients exercised over participants was the power to withhold payment. Non-payment was a frequent complaint by participants who felt powerless to confront this. Matiana explained:

*Amuna amangofuna akugone. Pomwe ena amukutengera kunyumba kwawo chifukwa unalibe ya room*

(At times, some men would just sleep with you without giving you money. Sometimes men would ask you to go with them to their house because you don't have money for a room).

And Iviana also commented on the issue on non-payment:

*Zikatero amati uzipita apobi akubaya ukakamira ndalama. Azizathu ena anaziwonapo mwakuti amatichenjeza amuna achikhalidwecho akamatifuna*

(But after everything, they would ask you to leave or threaten to stab if you ask for money. Some of our friends who had gone through this would warn us in advance if such clients approached)

Failure by clients to pay for sex marked a different layer of unacceptability, particularly since it undermined the primary motivation for engaging in prostitution which was to earn sufficient means for economic survival. Mpalini, whose cousin was one of two young girls being kept at a brothel in District Y, was of the view that should the two young girls have been allowed to keep money for their services, then their ‘state of prostitution’ could have been acceptable.

*Akanakhala kuti amawapasa ndalama sibwenzi lili vuto sibwenzi akugwiritsa ntchito ndalamayo ndikumathandizikira*

(It could not have been a problem had they been given money which they could have used for their daily needs).

She spoke similarly when asked what she considered challenging about involvement.

*amuna ena amathawa osapereka ndalama, pena kukuopseza ukakamira chonsecho iweyo umakhala kuti wadalala kuti apa ndapana koma pakapita nthawi umoona wangodyetsa phula, amvekere sakukufuna pamene iweyo umaganiza kuti upeza ndalama. Kenako umamva akuti sakwanitsa ndalama munapangana, umuwona wayamba kuthawathawa, umuona uyo akuti ndikubwera ndikataye madzi, basi omwewo iweyo kukusiya mu room. Zimakhala zopweteka maka ukakutengera kutali ndikukuthawa osakupasa ndalama*

(Clients leaving without paying after everything. When you meet a client you become reliant on him, hoping that you will earn something from him. And after a while with him, he would say: I don't think I can afford the price you have charged me. And he would just excuse himself as if he is going to the toilet and then take off, leaving you with nothing. He would possibly leave you at the room. It is even worse when that client took you to some place away from here and he would leave when you don't have any transport as you had hoped that he was your source of earning.)

Emoni also recalled how some clients would pick her up and then abandon her in an unfamiliar place without money or means of heading back home.

Referring to the abusive behaviours of clients, participants described significant limitations in achieving the majority of Nussbaum's (2003) central capabilities in particular:

- Life (worth living): being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
- Bodily health: being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
- Bodily integrity: being secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence and having opportunities for choice in matters of reproduction.
- Emotions: not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
- Practical reason: being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.

- Affiliation: having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.

Nonetheless, as active agents, they continued their involvement in prostitution through the exercise of adaptive preferences (Nussbaum, 2001a) accepting the situations in which they found themselves since without involvement, the possibility of living, one of the central capabilities, was threatened even further. As Diami explained: *ine ndimangofuna ndalama ya chakudya chalero* (Not that the money was enough, but without it, I couldn't survive). While involvement was intended to support participants as a means of survival, as the argued within the liberal feminist view of prostitution, participants' involvement both failed to secure, and further constrained, the achievement of central capabilities.

Participants' framing of themselves as active agents while simultaneously identifying their circumstances as having created the conditions that led them into prostitution reveals another view of their involvement as exploitation and of themselves as victims of the exploitative and abusive behaviour of men. These perspectives reflect feminist argument, structure and agency explanations and the logic of the Capability Approach. The faintest theoretical presence among participants' views is the children's rights approach, though this is prominent in Loni's story, raising the possibility that stories of initial engagement in prostitution based on recall, may serve to blunt or blur detailed memories of early experiences of engagement in prostitution.

The older participants' experiences reflected evidence from some sources in different contexts (Montgomery, 2001; Phoenix, 2001; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005; e.g. Orchard, 2007), that prostitution

was not the result of physical coercion, trafficking, grooming or indenturing, processes that feature strongly in research on child prostitution (UNICEF, 2001b; Andrews, 2004; UNICEF, UNESCAP and ECPAT, 2006; Barnardo's, 2009; Pearce, 2009, 2011; Ecpat International, 2011; Melrose *et al.*, 2013; Bang *et al.*, 2014; ECPAT International, 2014). But even in Loni's case, the children's rights approach can only offer partial understanding. A more holistic understanding also requires reference of other theoretical perspectives. And this is because Loni, as all the other participants, did indeed exercise agency in situations she considered as extremely difficult, sometimes deeply disturbing, and she devised ways to manage or overcome the undesirable situations in which she found herself.

This insight serves to illustrate the limitations of interventions to 'rescue' children and young people from prostitution because of their age and 'victimhood'. Without offering alternative, sustainable means of living, such interventions risk failure as the conceptualisation of prostitution, by external actors, simply as abuse and exploitation takes little or no account of the complex combination of conscious motivations and wider structural influences that drive children into prostitution. And without a deeper appreciation of the influence of broader structural influences on the daily experiences of girls and women, many children and young people involved in prostitution perceive the practice as a means of survival, not as a form of abuse and exploitation per se.

In summarising participants' own understandings of engagement, and experiences of involvement, in prostitution, it is worth recalling O'Connell Davidson (2005a) argument that prostitution is, in general, a risky/difficult sector subjecting everyone involved to appalling

experiences. In this study, participants' own understandings illustrated recognizable elements of all the theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature review. Yet, they also raised questions about the sufficiency of each theoretical perspective to aid understanding of child prostitution in Malawi.

Explicit references to rape, violence and exposure to HIV were all clear markers of threats to bodily integrity, one of Nussbaum's central capabilities. Yet participants showed that without involvement in prostitution, the possibility of living, one of the central capabilities, is threatened further. While involvement was intended, by participants, to provide a means of meeting basic needs, as argued within the liberal feminist view of prostitution, we saw that involvement did not secure but further constrained the lives, and quality of the lives, of participants.

This complex and disturbing face of involvement in prostitution is set alongside a second face characterised by the notion of agency and circumstances so challenging that prostitution appears the only practicable choice. While participants showed a strong awareness of these challenging circumstances, they made little or no indication of how these circumstances were driven by other structural factors often taken for granted or perceived as the norm (*umusangalatsa mwamuma* - normalised by participants): unable to be educated on the basis of gender, the expectations of girls to engage in sexual activities and marry upon puberty or the notion of girls and women as sexual objects expected to submit to the needs and pleasures of men/husbands.

In the following section I turn to consider the role of structural factors in understanding children and young people's involvement in prostitution.



### **6.3 Why and How Children and Young People Engage in Prostitution**

In this section of the chapter, I draw on the findings presented in chapter 5 and children and young people's own understandings of their involvement in prostitution, to develop my own critical analysis of why and how children and young people in Malawi engage in prostitution and how social, economic, political and cultural issues influence and shape their engagement and experiences of involvement. While participants made sense of their involvement as an outcome of agency to survive or cope with a range of different challenging circumstances in their lives, what remained unrecognized and unspoken in their accounts were specific structural factors associated with cultural norms related to gender that made involvement in prostitution plausible or inevitable for participants.

As in the previous section, I make reference to the four theoretical perspectives discussed in chapter three to make sense of the findings and develop a nuanced understanding of child prostitution. In doing so, I open a space for a multi-dimensional understanding of child prostitution.

#### **6.3.1 The Role of Structural Factors**

##### **Pen Portrait 3: Bureni**

BURENI, 22, first got involved in prostitution when she was aged between 15 and 17. She was born to a teenage mother who became pregnant while in school. Raised by a single mother, Bureni described her involvement in prostitution as being motivated by the need for money for food and fashion clothes as her unemployed mother could not afford to cater for the family's daily needs. Her grandfather, a retired primary school teacher, is the only person with a professional qualification in Bureni's family. Before sitting for her Junior Certificate exams, she was expelled for having an affair with two different teachers, while the teachers were simply transferred to

different schools. In the context of this study, Bureni claimed to have initially been involved in prostitution while still at primary school.

Following her expulsion, she left for Liwonde, a tourist semi-urban centre that connects Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mangochi and Zomba which are big cities and popular tourist attraction areas. While there, she joined her cousin, the same age as Bureni, who was already involved in prostitution. A number of Bureni's sisters and other relatives (such as cousins and aunts) were also engaged in the practice. Bureni, Mpalini, and the 13-year-old young girl lured into prostitution together with Loni, were cousins, living only a few yards away from each other. Her sister is currently living in Lilongwe and engaged in prostitution. Bureni described their involvement as the result of personal decisions made on the basis of inadequate support to meet basic needs, and facilitated by the fact that some of their older relatives were already involved. Bureni had also been in an abusive relationship after marrying a client. Despite mentioning that she had a boyfriend who knows of her involvement in prostitution, and at times, she takes him out for drinks<sup>28</sup> she insisted that, at this time, she did not want to enter into a serious relationship since this would reduce her earnings and her independent life. She said repeatedly: *hule samasiya* (no one quits prostitution) and, as with other participants, used the expression *chiwanda cha uhule* indicating that she feels 'possessed' by prostitution.

Bureni's hopes are to build her own house as well as invest in a small scale enterprise. She supports her daughter (conceived as a result of prostitution) and her family through continued involvement in prostitution. Although she wants her daughter to continue with school rather than prostitution, describing education as key to well-being, she fears that her own involvement may increase the likelihood of her daughter engaging in prostitution and added that more children and young people in the area were being enticed into prostitution by road construction workers.

While discussing their involvement in terms of agency in the quest to survive different circumstances (including but not limited to: poverty, orphanhood, absence of supportive or

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<sup>28</sup> This is unusual in this socio-cultural context.

subsistence level of family care, violent marriages and responsibility for self and children), participants shared little awareness of the influence of structural factors, particularly the highly gender differentiated culture, in determining their engagement and continuing involvement in prostitution. Without the power to exercise any control over these factors, their influence in participants' decisions to engage in prostitution remained invisible, part of the 'taken for granted' fabric of life. In this way, engaging in transactional sex for financial or material exchange in circumstances where they 'might otherwise refrain' (Dunkle *et al.*, 2007, p. 1235) had become normalised and participants focused solely on factors directly preceding their decision to engage in prostitution. Repeated reference to the inevitability of prostitution as their 'fate' offered a clear indication that their involvement was unlikely to end even if these 'immediate' motivating factors were resolved.

Bureni's words 'no-one quits prostitution' were followed by a rhetorical question: *hule amasiya?* (does a prostitute quit?). She had never known someone leave prostitution for good and recalled examples of her relatives who would temporarily take a break before re-engaging. Bureni's response was reinforced by other participants who also perceived themselves as: *chiwanda cha uhule* (possessed by prostitution), implying that the possibility of leaving prostitution was extremely rare. Despite learning that prostitution often involved non-payment, violence or control by clients or third parties, the alternatives to prostitution as a means of meeting survival needs seemed impossible.

While Loni's escape from her traffickers and return home to her mother may offer a glimmer of the possibilities of leaving prostitution, I learned later that Loni had become pregnant aged 14.

The likelihood in this situation is that she will be considered an adult, responsible for herself and her child (unless the father were known and willing to support them – a highly unlikely situation). Under such circumstances, it is not difficult to see that she may be faced with little alternative to prostitution in the immediate interests of her own and her child's survival, particularly in a wider family context in which prostitution/transactional sex has become normalized.

The widespread and extreme poverty (UNDP, 2015; MGNSO, 2016) that leaves the majority of the country's population seeking a means of survival is fuelled by a number of factors that interact in complex ways that mitigate against economic and social change. HIV and AIDS related deaths and disability have depleted human resources necessary for agro-production and other economic activities while also leaving many children without a primary means of support (Young and Ansell, 2003; Kidman and Heymann, 2016). Global economic policies including imposed austerity measures by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as conditions of financial aid have constrained Malawi's investment in social welfare programmes. And, geopolitical power relations have enabled global companies to avoid paying taxes in Malawi, limiting the potential of tax revenue (Dahlbeck 2016; Conroy, Blackie, Whiteside, et al. 2016). Added to these pressures, widespread and systematic corruption has further reduced the effectiveness of poverty reduction plans and programmes (R. Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2007; Strasser, 2016).

Cultural factors also clearly play their part in limiting the means of survival available to children and young women so that participants felt they had little choice but to continue their involvement

in prostitution. However, these factors remained largely invisible to participants, taken for granted, and as such they remained incontestable. The data clearly indicate that culture occupies a cross cutting position, with cultural factors directly or indirectly driving involvement. One key example is offered by the gendered experiences of poverty that led participants to consider transactional sex as a normalized choice. Adopting a critical feminist lens (Shefer, 2016) and bearing in mind the politicisation of child prostitution (Kropiwnicki, 2012), in the following section I offer further analysis of the ways in which culture occupies a significant but overlooked position in children and young people's involvement in prostitution; cutting across other circumstances and conditions that influenced their decisions to engage in prostitution.

### **6.3.2 The Normalisation of Transactional Sex**

Emerging from the findings is a picture of the normalisation of transactional sex as the means to support for survival, consistent with feminist perspectives of prostitution that position girls and women as sexual objects for the gratification of men. This picture emerges from the data in two ways: first in terms of the normative expectation that girls will be prepared for marriage and sexual activity from a young age, and second that marriage, rather than education and employment, is the means through which girls and women are most likely to be able to access support for their daily needs. These interconnected expectations are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

#### **6.3.2.1 The Positioning of Women and Girls as Material for Sex and Marriage**

A particular factor driving the decision to engage in prostitution for some of the participants was as a practical means of survival in the face of multi-dimensional poverty, the absence of a

caregiver, or the presence of an abusive caregiver. The roles that girls and women are traditionally expected to occupy as housewives, serving the (sexual) needs (*kuthangata*<sup>29</sup>) of men they marry, emerge as central throughout several of the stories of involvement, and the experiences endured by participants. Yet, marriage was frequently referred to as the first alternative that could enable them to quit prostitution. Loni, for example, explained that she did not like the media taking photos or video footage of her when her traffickers were arrested because this would identify her and compromise her chance of getting married.

Most societies in Malawi limit the position, or primary role, of girls and women to that of housewife. It is expected that once girls reach puberty they will take on this traditional role. This helps to explain why only Loni considered her involvement in prostitution as victimisation and abuse (consistent with the children's rights approach) since her involvement preceded puberty. She explained: *enawo anali akulu*, the other girls who were there were adults. Loni's own understanding of the abuse, expressed in terms of her own physical development – not yet having breasts, reinforces the notion of childhood as a cultural construct legitimising sexual activity for girls once they have reached puberty.

This cultural construct of sexual maturity results in limiting the central capabilities of girls and young women. Early marriage (and pregnancy) compromise reproductive health, are often associated with violence that threatens bodily integrity, leaving girls and young women in fear with little opportunity to 'plan' their lives or be treated with dignity as people of equal worth to that of others (Nussbaum, 2003).

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<sup>29</sup> *Kuthangata connotes servile status*

This cultural expectation, that following puberty girls are prepared for sexual activity, creates a paradoxical situation in which prostitution is, on the one hand, understood as part of a wider set of social norms while, on the other hand, it is publicly denounced as morally wrong and having a damaging effect on broader social relations (Browne and Barrett, 2001; Kaler, 2006; Verheijen, 2013). Participants in this research rarely made any reference to the moralist position, though they did express concern about their own daughters' involvement or potential involvement in prostitution. Loni's mother in particular drew attention to the unacceptability of Loni's involvement before she had reached puberty: *sinanga wangayo anapita asanathe msinkhu* (considering that my daughter went [into prostitution] under age). But apart from the aspiration that their daughters should receive better education and exercise greater choice about their future lives, participants did not express any kind of moralist view about their daughters' involvement in prostitution as long as this happened after puberty.

The connection between early sexual activity, early marriage, early pregnancy and prostitution has been documented by other studies (Barnardo's, 1998; Cusick, 2002; S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003; Dodsworth, 2015). And the stories of participants in this research confirm these experiences which, for the majority, were associated with their first encounters with prostitution soon after reaching puberty. Taking a children's rights perspective, Malawi's social construction of childhood with puberty as a transitional period into sexual maturity, could be viewed as a form of institutionalised victimisation and abuse of girls and young women. In the case of early or pre-marital pregnancy, as was the case for Diami and Babani, younger girls are left with responsibility for supporting their own children often without the help of the father or their own

parents, even where their mothers have experienced similar challenges. For example, Emoni was clear that she would not accept additional responsibilities when her daughter became pregnant. Cultural norms play a significant role here, associating childbirth with maturity and adult responsibility to contribute to family income or become independent and take responsibility for one's own life and meeting one's own needs. Unmarried girls who experience early pregnancy are further disadvantaged since pre-marital pregnancy is widely believed in Malawian societies to bring shame to families (Levandowski *et al.*, 2012), leading to common denials of paternity. This also leaves girls and young women, still in need of support on their own behalf, having to consider ways of supporting their own children, and their transition into adulthood is established in cultural terms. All participants except Loni had children to look after, and they clearly stated that their involvement in prostitution was the only way through which they could afford to buy food and cater for other day-to-day needs including supporting their own children. In this sense their involvement in prostitution represents a clear form of agency, albeit limited form of agency because of many constraints such as cultural expectations, poverty, unequal and abusive power exercised by men paying or engaging women for sex (Nussbaum, 2005, 2013).

Early marriage and early pregnancy also have implications for girls who drop-out of school at an early age. Policies encouraging teen mothers to return to school after giving birth are still relatively new in Malawi (Chigona and Chetty, 2008; Grant, 2012) and have yet to demonstrate clear gains. Indeed, research suggests the persistence of cultural expectations is slowing change in this respect (Kendall and Kaunda, 2015). Early marriage also leaves girls and young women prone to 'domestic' abuse the result of the marked power imbalance within the household. And this in turn heightens the possibility of separation. Iviana, Emoni, Diami, Jobani, Bureni were



among other participants who had entered into early marriages but chose to leave as way of escaping violence. They decided that, after leaving their marriages, prostitution was the most feasible means of survival. In other words, any form of separation meant absence of the means of support for these participants and increased their chance of engaging in prostitution.

Emoni's experience offers a clear example. She explained:

*Ndinabwela kuno ndi amuna anga. Koma chifukwa chankhanza ndikukanikana titapita kwa nkhoswe, banja lika linatha. Ndiye ndimakhala kuno ndekha, kumayang'anira ana aja. Sichinali chapafupitu sinanga monga munthu wa mai oti poyambilira amandidikha ndi amuna anga aja. Ndinayamba ya ugadi koma Kandalama kake kanali kochepe. Amatipatsa K4,500 pomwepo chakudya, lendi ndiye. Ndiye kuti ndidyetse ana, ndalamazo sizimakwanira.*

(I came here with my husband, but following disagreements that we failed to resolve, we separated. I started staying alone, and was left with the responsibility to look after the children. As a single mother, I found it hard for me. Initially, my husband was providing for me, but then I had to find means to survive. So, I started working as a guard but the payment was very low. I was getting about MK4500. The amount was just not enough to buy food for the children. While I was finding it hard, a friend of mine confided that together with other friends, she was doing sex work which was supporting her despite not working. So, I asked her to take me that night. She lent me her outfit to wear for that night. That is how I started going).

To summarise, in addition to setting post-puberty girls on the pathway into prostitution through early sexual activities, early pregnancy, and/or early marriage, cultural factors in most Malawian societies position girls and women in a position of reliance on their (fathers or) husbands as the primary source and means of their support. For many girls and women the most desired option is marriage, a position I explore further in the following section. But where marriage is unattainable or becomes an unacceptable option, then prostitution, as an alternative form of transactional sex, easily becomes an acceptable choice.

#### **6.3.2.2 Marriage as the Means through Which Girls and Women can Access Support**

While puberty marks a rite of passage into a period of marriage and legitimised sexual activity, and the position of girls and women as existing for marriage is reinforced, participants continued to consider marriage as the first route to leave prostitution and access support through a husband. Indeed, one participant stopped attending data collection activities in this research when she started cohabiting with a man. However, the other participants insisted that she had not quit prostitution. Rather, in seeking to assure ongoing financial support she had removed herself from activities associated with prostitution wanting the man to believe she was '*mkazi wa bwino*' (a normal woman). In making sense of prostitution, Phoenix (2001) also documented the contrasted identities that those involved in prostitution make in relation to the cultural and societal expectations. Also, by making this effort, participants illustrated their ability to exercise agency on how they presented themselves to various clients and wanted the clients to see them in line with societal norms and expectations of a woman, male/female sexual relations as well as prostitution (Phoenix, Brown and Walklate, 2012). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the moralist view of prostitution (discussed in detail in Section 3.3.1), remains dominant in Malawi.

This cultural positioning as prospective housewives, as material for marriage through which women expect to access support, served to legitimise transactional sex, with prostitution and marriage achieving the same short term goal – support to meet basic, and possibly other material, needs. Jobani’s story (Pen Portrait 4) shows how she considered her pregnancy and marriage as the possible means through which she could find support from a husband, even though this did not turn out as she had anticipated.

#### **Pen Portrait 4: Jobani**

JOBANI, aged 30 at the time of this study, became actively involved in prostitution when she was around 16 years old. Together with her three siblings Jobani was raised by a single mother who died when Jobani was 16. With her cousin Diami, she was briefly fostered by her grandparents who were living in [City Z]. But she returned to District X following persistent mistreatment. With no one to help her, she dropped out of school in Form 2 as she was unable to meet the costs associated with schooling. To survive without a breadwinner or subsistence means of support, Jobani started to engage in prostitution. A few months later, she became pregnant and married one of her clients to whom she had been introduced by a friend who was already engaged in prostitution.

Jobani described being pregnant as lucky. For her, marriage offered a means to leave prostitution and escape her deprived life. Her expectation was that the man would provide for her needs. However, her husband was continually abusive and she was admitted to the local hospital as a result of the physical abuse she endured. She described her experience of marriage as being worse than her involvement in prostitution. On reporting the abuse to the law enforcement agency, she was simply advised to settle the matter through traditional means with elders acting as family counsellors. As a result, she separated from the man and reengaged in prostitution.

Running a small local restaurant, Jobani described her continued involvement as a way of supplementing her income to enable her to move beyond basic survival<sup>30</sup>. But she did not consider prostitution as a sustainable means of support, explaining that it was a choice born of despair.

We can begin to see here how, for the participants in this study, sexual relations are seen as transactional, a perception that leads to prostitution being seen in a similar light as marriage – which participants identified as one of the alternative means of support. This was openly acknowledged by all participants and was also evident in the way participants discussed how they viewed themselves in relationship to other women who were housewives. Nine participants (Ruziana; Luviana; Matiana; Iviana; Zani; Mpaseni; Bureni; Umani; Jobani) recognized marriage as offering false hopes of security and explained that they preferred prostitution to marriage. As one participant explained:

*Kungoti uyu opita kumseu ndi daily cash pomwe uyoyo akudikira kwa mwamuna wake*  
(the person engaging in prostitution is independent while the housewife has to rely on the husband for her support, despite playing almost the same roles).

This raises the question: why do married women need to rely on their husbands for support? And this question leads us into the territory of gendered educational opportunity. None of the participants possessed educational qualifications that could allow them to enter into a professional job market and only one participant had completed secondary school. Their current choices, as well as plans for their own lives, as detailed within the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2003) were, therefore, limited to situations involving a male figure for support (in

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that running a restaurant does not denote security. As has been noted by Ansell *et al*, (2014) the efficacy of business as a long-term livelihood trajectory is questionable.

exchange for sex within marriage or through prostitution). Explained through the lens of the Capability Approach and clearly fitting feminist perspectives of women occupying liminal positions, and reduced here to roles as sexual objects, the real choices open to women, confine them to conforming to, or ‘obeying’ cultural expectations that they will engage in sexually-related activities as a means of support, whether through marriage or prostitution. Bureni explained clearly that, for her, engagement in prostitution was not significantly different from marriage considering that, just like marriage, prostitution served a similar purpose – a means to access the support of men.

While making sense of their identities as women as part of this research, participants perceived their engagement in prostitution as not significantly different from being a housewife, within a cultural context characterised by the undervaluing of education for girls; early marriages and/or early pregnancies; and the normalisation of male violence. In the following section I explore the question of girls’ marginalisation from formal educational opportunities, linked to early marriage and early pregnancy in the overarching context of poverty, before addressing the normalisation of gender-based violence and its impact on the capabilities of girls and young women.

### **6.3.3 Education is Not for Girls**

A question that emerged from individual stories and group discussions with participants was why women, whether housewives or not, have to rely on men for support? Marriage was seen by almost all participants as the most likely pathway out of prostitution. However, with previous experience of abusive marriages, some participants did not see the need to commit to marriage.

Umani clearly stated that she never wanted to enter into marriage because she had felt used by men as child-bearing product. She said:

*Amunawa amangofuna akuyuzi, uwaberekere ana basi akusiye. Ndiye ndikhala ndi ana angati poti awa akundikanika kale kulela.*

(All men want is to use you. He will dump you the moment you bear him a child. And how many children will I have to raise by myself? I am already failing with ones I have now.)

Umani, continuing on the theme of women as sexual or child-bearing objects, and consistent with feminist perspectives on women's position in patriarchal societies, showed her agency in explaining why she never wanted to commit herself to a marriage. But she explained that if she had not been used and dumped, she may have considered 'settling down' with a man who was willing to offer her day-to-day support. Thus, we get back to the question: why did participants consider marriage or transactional sex as their means of support? In exploring this question through the data, it becomes clear that participants' limited levels of educational achievement played a significant influence in limiting, or constraining, their views and decisions to express 'adaptive preferences' (Nussbaum, 2001a; Khader, 2009). And participants' limited educational achievements have their roots in the cultural norms that position girls and young women as housewives in waiting.

#### **Pen Portrait 5: Mazani & Nolani**

MAZANI, aged 30 first engaged in prostitution when she was aged between 13 and 14 years. She has three daughters who she said rarely go to school because she cannot afford to meet the associated costs (primary school is notionally 'free', but uniforms must be purchased and
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contributions made to the school fund that each school sets to run school activities to supple-ment government funding).

Mazani is younger sister to 33-year-old Nolani who also participated in the study. During the course of fieldwork, Nolani asked to change her identity from a sex worker to someone who was aware of and interested in the lives/welfare of those involved in prostitution and explained she had learned the things she told me from interacting with sex workers. But she continued to participate in the activities and mostly referred to herself during group meeting as a sex worker

None of the participants had reached tertiary education and only Babani had a Malawi School Certificate of Education (i.e., completed secondary education). The majority had dropped out while still at primary level, and offered two explanations. First, their limited education reflected extreme poverty at family level. Like other participants, Mazani stated during one group meeting that she could not afford to meet the costs of school for her children through what she was earning. So even while prostitution was seen as a means of support, the earnings derived from clients was not always adequate to cater for all needs. Discussing this challenge participants recalled their own experiences of their parents being unable to pay to allow them to continue their schooling, or going to lessons on an empty stomach. As Mazani put it:

*Osadya munthu ungamve mkalasi? Ndiye uzingogonatu*

(Would you be attentive in class without eating? No, you would just be dozing off).

Evidence from Malawi and other countries (Chimombo *et al.*, 2000; Madamombe, 2007; Mgwangqa and Lawrence, 2008; Chimombo, 2009; Shahidul and Karim, 2015; Moyo, Ncube and Khupe, 2016) captures the connection identified by Mazani. Despite primary school being free of fees, uniforms and food are expected to be provided by parents to ensure continuity of

education. And even where a child passes the exam to gain a place at secondary school, unless fees are waived, parents face the challenge of finding fees. Under these circumstances (such as poverty and cultural norms), it is unsurprising that most participants had not progressed to secondary school.

The impact of poverty on educational opportunity is heightened by the second explanation given by participants: the fact that in most Malawian societies, girls' education is not considered a priority. This is linked to the view of girls and women in society existing as sexual partners and housewives in waiting, and failing to consider the potential advantages of educating girls to a higher level. In contrast, education for boys is given an elevated status. As Emoni explained when talking about her son, this is because the boys are perceived not only as supporters of their wives and children, but also their parents. The education of the boys is therefore perceived as worthwhile family investment. Within the theoretical framework of the Capability Approach, this leads girls and women to take decisions in accordance with, or to 'obey' their situations. Without little formal education, the male figure is perceived as their means of support and survival. Nussbaum's (Nussbaum, 1999, 2001b) argument is that while some women may prefer a life of deference, obedience and self-sacrifice, justice can only be served by ensuring that women have options beyond serving and obeying others.

Drawing on this cultural position of girls and women as marriage material, the education of girls is not a priority for parents. This has also been reflected at community level and has been prevalent in political decision making at national level. It is only recently that policies devised to change the status quo of girls have been formulated. However, in most instances, the cultural



underpinnings are not critically taken into account. For example, the policy of providing free primary education for all in Malawi was made on the basis that by making education free for all, girls would be motivated to attend. This has not been the case. In relation to a specific initiative to promote girl's education, Kadzamira and Rose (2003, pp. 504–505) explained:

At the time when a USAID funded programme to promote girls' basic literacy and education (GABLE) was implemented girls' education was not a priority of the government and gender disparities were not targeted in education policies and plans. As a result, there is some concern that initiatives aimed at improving girls' schooling have not always been internalised within the Ministry of Education, partly due to weak organisational structures. In addition, attention to monitoring of the programme at the classroom level has been weak and, given the extensive resources allocated by USAID, questions of its sustainability remain.

Sen (Sen, 1999, 2005) offers an argument that clearly challenges this framework of devising policies intended to achieve social justice on the assumption that 'equal' interventions will lead to measures to address structural inequalities. Without a critical examination of cultural factors that lead families and communities to disregard the education of girls, national policies are embraced by such communities in a manner that reinforce the same structural inequalities the policy was designed to address. For girls, free education meant further concentration of family resources on the needs of boys. As Nussbaum (2003, p. 35) explains: in a nation where women are traditionally discouraged from pursuing an education, it will usually take more resources to produce female literacy than male literacy. Emoni explained why she focused on the education of her son. She said:

*kuti ndi amene azandithangate msogolo...pomwe winayo ndatuma kumuzi kuti  
asandibweretserenso mavuto pomwe winayo akukwatira*

(because he is one who is likely to support me in future, while the daughters will marry and while I have sent the one who got pregnant to the village because I did not want her to add more responsibilities on my head).

However, Emoni did not directly connect her own early marriage with her subsequent involvement in prostitution, nor that the early pregnancy of her daughter may have had placed her on a pathway into prostitution. Neither did she consider that she might be supported by her daughters if they were educated. With very few women educated for good jobs, there was a distinct lack of role models whom girls and young women felt they could emulate or give them encouragement to educate their daughters. Growing up with the image of women as housewives, supported by male breadwinners, takes a strong hold in the imaginaries of young women.

This provides further explanation for why participants did not resist dropping out of school. With marriage viewed as more significant and being more highly valued in their respective societies they did not see the benefit of education. However, the relationship between school drop-out, marriage, and involvement in prostitution is complex. While Bureni, for example, dropped out of school once she became involved in prostitution, others (Diami, Mpaseni) became engaged in prostitution after they had dropped out of school because they lacked the support to cover the necessary costs. Expectations that they should make a contribution to family living costs prompted the search for work and where the only available, poorly paid, jobs failed to yield sufficient income, prostitution offered a tempting alternative.

Much as participants clearly stated that their options for engaging in alternative forms of income generation were limited because they lacked proper qualifications, or because they considered a husband/man as the primary source of support, the influence of cultural factors in determining their poor levels of educational achievement remained unacknowledged, forming part of the ‘taken for granted’ background to their lives. And similarly, they did not make any connection between broader cultural factors, their access only to low paid work and their involvement in prostitution. In this way, we can interpret their actions as being determined by their situations, leaving them with limited capability to plan their own futures (Nussbaum, 2000).

#### **6.3.4 Normalisation of Gender Based Violence**

The experiences of abuse and violence that participants recalled having endured in prostitution or marriage (for Jobani) were seen as being deep-rooted and justified within cultural underpinnings (Kathewera-Banda *et al.*, 2005). With women seen as the *mthangati* (helpers) of men, and commonly accepted notions that *banja ndikupilira* (women need to exercise patience in marriage) and *chigololo ndi mwini thako and if a man* (if a husband behaves badly or mistreats his wife it is her fault) there is a sense that men may treat women as they wish because they are paying/supporting her. In this way male violence against women has become normalised and is rarely challenged (Mandal and Hindin, 2013) in marriage or in prostitution. All participants recounted an experience of physical abuse or violent encounter with a client. To others, the *fact* that they were engaging in a practiced deemed immoral (Tsoka, Mwanri and others, 2014) seemed to justify how the men treated them and some participants blamed themselves for their abuse:

Lubani: *Azimai akuziwona ku uhuleko, kumenyedwa* (women engaging in prostitution experience a lot of violence from client).

Jobani: *Komanso ndiye kuti chilipo, mwamuna sangangochoka uko ndikukumenya* (That means the woman has done something to irritate the client. He cannot just behave violently).

Babani: *Ndiye kuti ulindivuto ndiwe* (It could be you who has a problem)

Emoni: *Tisanamizaneipo , azanu tikukumana ndi nkhanza, kumenyedwa kumene popanda chifukwa* (It would be a lie to pretend as if things are fine. Some of us were beaten by client for no reason).

At the time of conducting fieldwork for this research prostitution was illegal, making it especially difficult for participants to seek redress or to report their abuse to the police for fear of being arrested or mocked. Yet, they were clear in their views that to develop an understanding of men's violent and abusive behaviour would require engagement with men themselves. In this way participants identified men's violence, rooted in cultural norms, as an underexplored area requiring further research (Peacock and Barker, 2014).

#### **6.4 Theoretical Implications**

In this section, I focus specifically on drawing out the theoretical implications of the analysis of the research findings. It is clear that involvement in prostitution for children and young people does not always subscribe to the children's rights framework's one dimensional view, that children involved in prostitution are physically or coercively forced into prostitution. In this study, in a context in which puberty marks a rite of passage indicating sexual maturity and readiness for marriage, none of the participants understood their involvement in prostitution as a

form of sexual abuse. All participants, including Loni whose description of involvement suited the children's rights approach of victimhood, showed agency in making decisions informed by the will to gain access to resources in order to meet basic needs and in some cases, material needs. Loni also showed agency in taking steps to escape from her traffickers. For all other participants, engaging in prostitution was a personal choice (*kuutsanza mtima*) a decision taken as part of a quest to meet daily needs such as food, rent and clothing. And even Loni explained her experience of being trafficked as victimisation, on the basis that she was still a child who had not yet developed breasts or reached puberty. Here we see evidence of the structure and agency approach to understanding child prostitution that challenges the children's rights approach, bounded by the demarcation of childhood as a period below the age of 18, implying a stage of innocence, asexuality and immaturity. The contrast between the understandings of participants in this research and the children's rights approach illustrates: i) notions of childhood as a social construct that varies across cultures, and ii) that children and young people are active agents in making and acting on decisions that inform the ways in which they lead their lives (Hendrick, 1997; James and Prout, 1997; Montgomery, 2009a; Boakye-Boaten, 2010).

However, the use of the notion of agency, in contexts where choices and decisions are highly constrained has been questioned, particularly when used by Western scholars and particularly when it is invoked to challenge the relevance of children's rights. Bordonaro and Payne (2012) refer to the 'ambiguous agency' of children and young people living in precarious circumstances in Africa, drawing attention to the problematic use of 'agency' in research on children's lives. Their argument is based on empirical evidence including Seymour's study of interventions to support children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Seymour (2012) describes three

strategies adopted by children to survive in contexts of poverty and violence: transactional sex, soldiering and street living. She argues (p 382) that child protection interventions in the DRC would be more relevant if, rather than relying on assumed vulnerabilities and simplified right-based discourses, they accounted for the extremely complex and often violent conditions which proscribe each day.

Participants' understandings of their involvement in prostitution were dominated by poverty. Much as it was not the focus of this study, poverty at both national and household levels had a strong impact on participants' lives and their decisions to engage in prostitution, alongside structural factors including patriarchal cultural structures that limited participants' access to education, and access to economic opportunities/choices/activities to support livelihoods. The impact of these structural factors left participants reliant on men, husbands or clients, as their primary means of support. And to access this support, participants engaged in transactional sex, from puberty onwards, either because, as orphans or because their families were simply too poor, they could not access parental support, or because they were considered as adults by their families, a perception linked to being post puberty or having children of their own.

Normative expectations of early marriage did not necessarily provide the hoped-for route to security, and it was clear that some participants had exercised their agency in a strong way by escaping violent husbands, with a view to seeking safety and a livelihood to support themselves and their children.

However, it has been observed by Montgomery (2007) and O'Connell Davidson (2005) that placing importance on agency may entail acceptance of, or respect for, the choices of individuals. The danger here is that focussing on the agency and voluntary involvement of the participants in the study, could imply acceptance of children and young women's engagement in prostitution. What was clear in this research, however, was that participants understood their engagement in prostitution as the result of poverty together with other circumstances such as losing parents and the absence of alternative effective support. They also made it clear that as part of their involvement in prostitution they had been subjected to physical, sexual and financial and emotional abuse evidenced by expressions of fear. In these ways, participants illustrated the value of the Capability Approach in understanding their involvement in prostitution. The agency they exercised was constrained in many ways so that they exercised adaptive preferences, choosing prostitution largely as a means of survival with occasional interest in access to material goods. But in doing so they still experienced threats to their bodily health and bodily integrity, their senses, imagination and thought, and emotional freedom. Their ability to exercise practical reason in planning for the future was diminished; and they were treated in undignified and humiliating ways on the basis of their gender and exercised little or no control over their environment. In other words, their ability to achieve a set of capabilities that have been considered as the basis of a life worth living and fundamental entitlements of social justice (Nussbaum, 2003) was severely compromised.

On the basis of participants' stories of engagement and involvement in prostitution we can see glimpses of theories of structure and agency, and of radical and liberal feminist approaches that characterise prostitution in terms of exploitation and commodification of women's bodies, and

freedom of choice within a wider context of gender inequality, respectively. But using the lens of the Capability Approach, the impact of structural factors on girls' and young women's well-being in the cultural context of Malawi becomes clearer. And this clarity is helpful in understanding why attempts to 'rescue' girls and young women from prostitution are often unsuccessful (Rafferty, 2016) and helps to make sense of Bureni's claim that 'no one quits prostitution'. This has even been the case for Loni who 'rescued herself'. But having escaped from her traffickers and returned to her mother, she explained that no efforts were made to support her. And even had there been some intervention on an individual basis, this would not have changed the factors that had driven her to seek work in the city that inadvertently led her into prostitution. It, therefore, came as little surprise that about two years after returning home, I learned that Loni was pregnant but had not married. In this situation, it is likely she will be framed as an adult and required to cater for herself and her child, unless the child's father is willing to accept responsibility. These additional responsibilities are, in turn, likely to create the conditions in which resorting to prostitution may be the only realistic means for Loni to support herself and her child.

Efforts to support girls and young women to 'quit' prostitution that disregard cultural underpinnings that perceive girls and young women as housewives and child-bearers in waiting are unlikely to yield effective results since wider family and community interests are likely to resist changes to the normative expectations for girls and young women (Groves and Hinton, 2013).



In order to avoid being seen as a threat to deep rooted cultural views, global efforts to encourage a paradigm shift on cultural views girls and women must start, I argue, with the experiences of girls and women. Capturing these experiences through the use of participatory approaches emphasises dialogue using media that are accessible to those whose lives and experiences we are trying to understand. And the multi-dimensional theoretical understanding that has developed has been possible only through direct engagement with participants, seeing and hearing their stories of involvement in prostitution, seeing and hearing their own interpretations and identifying the broader cultural, economic and social structures and processes that serve resistance to change and maintain girls and young women in their status as objectified and second class citizens.

Bureni's words: *palibe hule amasiya* (no one quits prostitution) offer a sharp reminder that it is important not only to understand how structural factors shape involvement in prostitution, but also to understand how these structural factors enable or limit individuals' central capabilities. This takes the understanding of child prostitution beyond the notion of the children's rights, connecting explanations from different theoretical perspectives to capture the complex nature of children and young women's experiences of prostitution.

## **6.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have examined participants' own understandings of their involvement in prostitution. On one hand, participants viewed themselves as active agents who had decided to engage in prostitution as a means of survival. On the other hand, participants, while recounting their experience of involvement, also presented themselves as victims and prostitution as exploitation. But they did not present themselves as passive victims. In the second section of the

chapter, I drew on findings presented in chapter five as well as the first section of this chapter to offer my own critical understanding of why and how children and young people engage in prostitution and contextualised the findings within specific social, economic, cultural and political conditions. I argue that any interventions to address what is perceived as the injustice of having to resort to prostitution to survive, must be informed by a deep understanding of the cultural as well as economic factors that lead to the normalisation of transactional sex. And they should also be informed an understanding of the impact of involvement on their lives and society as whole. Efforts that focus only on one aspect of involvement are unlikely to generate effective results. In the next chapter, as I summarise this thesis, I draw recommendations for policy and practice and identify areas for future studies on the basis of these findings.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I provide an overview of the research; outline the empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions to understanding child prostitution and make recommendations for policy and future research before offering a final reflection on the impact of this research.

### **7.2 Overview of the Research**

Here, I offer a brief overview of the study that set out to develop a deep, nuanced, understanding of child prostitution in Malawi, a phenomenon that has attracted growing public concern in recent years. In chapter one, I outlined the problematic nature of the phenomenon and formulated key questions to be addressed in the empirical research:

1. How and why do children and young people in Malawi engage in prostitution?
2. How do children and young people understand their involvement in prostitution?
3. How do social, economic, political and cultural issues influence and shape children and young people's involvement including their routes into, continued involvement in and/or routes out of prostitution?

In chapter two, I introduced Malawi, the site of the research, in terms of its history, cultural norms and traditions, socio-economic situation, politics, and public policies that have relevance for this study. I focused particularly on education and health policies and their relevance for girls, as well as more direct measures to promote children's rights for example legislation to prevent early marriage.

Existing debates on child prostitution, explored in chapter three, the literature review, were framed in terms of children's rights, feminist approaches, and sociological understandings of structure and agency. In addition to these literatures, I explored the potential of the Capability Approach, concerned with the relationship between development, freedom, human rights and social justice, to deepen understanding of child prostitution in a developing country such as Malawi. In particular, I drew on Nussbaum's (2000, 2001b, 2003, 2013) extensions to Sen's (1995, 1999, 2001, 2004b) original formulation of the Capability Approach in which she develops argument about the position of women and girls. She outlines the survival strategies of women in adapting their expectations and desires in line with structural conditions. These include cultural norms in which women's needs and desires are systematically subordinated to those of men.

Chapter four outlined the qualitative methodology and participatory approach to the empirical study. I reflected on the challenges of negotiating access, the use of a range of participatory methods, ethical challenges and dilemmas. And I discussed the process of data analysis that was designed to highlight participants' own understandings of their involvement in prostitution drawing on these to identify the strengths and limitations of the theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review.

In chapter five, I presented the participants and the experiences they shared through a range of participatory methods to explore questions of how and why they engaged in prostitution, how they understood their involvement and the influence of social, economic, political and cultural issues in influencing and shaping their engagement, involvement and aspirations for the future. Chapter six developed a critical analysis of these experiences to develop the nuanced understanding of child prostitution that was the objective of this study.

### 7.3 Original Contributions

This study makes a number of original contributions to the field of child prostitution, empirically, methodologically and theoretically.

#### 7.3.1 Empirical Contributions

To my knowledge, this is the first empirical study of child prostitution in Malawi. It differs in its focus and methodology from other published studies focusing on prostitution in Malawi, including Forster's (2000) study of HIV/AIDs risk among women exchanging sex for cash; Kalanda's (2010) evaluation of an intervention with young sex workers to reduce sexually transmitted infections including HIV, MacPherson *et al*'s (2012) study of the risk of transactional sex with regards to HIV, and Tavory and Poulin's (2012) interview-based study with sex workers exploring notions of exchange and intimacy. This study extends knowledge and understanding of child prostitution in Malawi in new ways, focussing on children and young people's own understandings of their involvement.

#### 7.3.2 Methodological Contributions

The study differs from other studies of child prostitution across the world (see chapter three) that are largely formulated in terms of children's rights, rarely engaging with participatory approaches that privilege children's own frames of reference. A notable exception is the study by Abdella, Hoot and Tadesse's (2006) 'Seldom Heard Voices: Child Prostitutes in Ethiopia'. However, while their interviews with child prostitutes aged between ten and 16 revealed similar themes to this study in terms of why children become involved in, and how they experience, prostitution, the aim of their study was to bring the phenomenon of child prostitution to public attention to: result in a sense of **outrage**, **urgency**, and **action** among

those concerned with the rights and needs of the world's children (Abdella, Hool and Tadesse, 2006, pp. 881–82). My own argument is that a sense of outrage without a more nuanced understanding of individual agency in the context of prostitution is unlikely to lead to interventions that are effective in supporting children and young people to achieve a sense of having sufficient freedom to do, and be, what they may value doing and being (Sen, 2001).

The use of a participatory approach and participatory techniques enabled me, as a man, to hear and listen to young people's experiences of a taboo subject, and their aspirations for the future, conveyed in ways of their own choosing. Reflecting on the experience of the research together with participants, the use of the expression *tikumalowa kwambiri* was common, conveying the sense that they had shared with me detailed experiences and deep thinking about their involvement in prostitution, making it possible to identify constrained choices that limited their individual agency. And reflecting on the value of the research to participants as I write this conclusion, although the study was intended to develop understanding of child prostitution, the words of one participant, Mpaseni, lent confidence that the use of diverse data collection techniques had enabled more fulsome expression than might be expected in individual interviews. Referring to a particular drawing, she explained: *Njira ya muthu 'yi indikumbutsa zambiri, kuyambira pomwe ndinkayambira kufikira pano* (the process of drawing enabled me to look back and speak about my involvement in prostitution from the time I started).

### **7.3.3 Theoretical Contribution: Insights from the Capability Approach**

Adopting the Capability Approach (Nussbaum, 2001b, 2005; Sen, 2001) as a framework for analysis enabled me to gain new theoretical insights. Thinking about their futures, while some participants aspired to what may be thought of as adaptive preferences (Nussbaum,

2005) – marriage to a man who could provide support – others, particularly those who had engaged in prostitution as a means of survival after escaping early and/or violent marriages, had reason to question the cultural norms that denied them the opportunity to pursue a life worth living. In this way, the study has extended theoretical thinking about child prostitution as an issue of social justice widening understanding of the phenomenon beyond ‘sexual abuse’ and ‘sexual exploitation’ as framed within the children’s rights approach and beyond ‘sex work’ as articulated in feminist approaches. It reveals the key structural conditions which constrained girls’ and young women’s choices to the extent that some chose to engage in prostitution and continue their involvement in spite of describing the experience as being ‘less than human’. Any sense of agency in these circumstances lay in contrast to agency exercised in unconstrained, or significantly less constrained, circumstances (Nussbaum, 2005; Esser, 2016). Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottermoller and Chizororo (2006, p. 185) have referred to ‘un-childlike’ issues of sexual health and child headed households in Zimbabwe and, drawing on their exploration of what they describe as the margins of human experience, argue that children must be understood both as competent and independent agents of social change and as vulnerable social becomings in need of protection. Bordonaro & Payne (2012) develop this argument, referring to the ‘ambiguous agency’ of children and young people living in precarious circumstances in Africa.

This notion of ambiguous agency represents a response to the uncritical use of agency applied to children and young people, a notion that was itself born of critiques of earlier positionings of children as innocent passive actors. Ambiguous agency, a term that matches the experiences of the children and young women in this study, challenges what has become normative argument about childhood, the kinds of behaviour they should demonstrate, the

activities they should be engaged in, and the spaces and places deemed appropriate for them to inhabit (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012, p. 366).

Drawing on the Capability Approach, I have illustrated how structural factors limited participants' ability to live lives they valued; how they made decisions to engage in prostitution as a result of the 'unfreedoms' associated with the structural conditions of their lives; and how these continued to limit the exercise of agency in their decisions to continue their involvement in prostitution. As Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2003, 2005) argues, the structure and agency perspective provides only limited explanations of the impact of social structures and individual decisions on individuals' sense of well-being.

In addition, my study contributes knowledge in terms of the suitability of the capability approach as a theoretical framework for qualitative studies that employ participatory approaches in order to learn from, and through, people's own accounts of their lives and experiences. Unlike Riswanda *et al* (2016) who also engage the capability approach in a study that examines prostitution in Indonesia, my study engages directly with participants' own accounts of their experiences of prostitution while Riswanda *et al*'s core aim was to understand the perceptions of how the phenomenon of prostitution was perceived by different interest groups. The adoption of a participatory approach as well as the synthesis of multiple theoretical approaches in participants' accounts of their own involvement and experience of prostitution enhances this contribution.

#### **7.4 Policy Recommendations**

I make three distinct recommendations for national and international policy-makers: i) the need for a multi-dimensional approach to interventions to address child prostitution, ii) the



use of the Capability Approach in drawing attention to structural factors as well as individual behaviour and experiences, and linking child prostitution to questions of national development and social justice, and iii) a recommendation directed specifically to global Northern agencies, to develop deeper understandings of the cultural contexts in which they seek to influence change.

#### **7.4.1 Policy Recommendation 1**

The complexity of factors affecting children and young people's engagement in prostitution demonstrates a need for national policies to be formulated in the light of evidence of the multi-dimensional nature of child prostitution that is influenced by a range of threats to livelihoods in rural and urban Malawi. These include poverty, disease - specifically HIV/AIDS - social structures and cultural factors that continue to subjugate girls and women in ways that deny them access to education, increase health risks associated with early marriage and child birth, and expose them to the greater likelihood of interpersonal violence associated with early marriage.

While this study was not designed specifically to examine or evaluate policies or interventions to address children's involvement in prostitution, the findings have clear relevance for policy-makers. Literature focussing on policy and legislation in the area of child sexual abuse identifies three key stages, or sites, for policy intervention: prevention of entry, protection of those engaged, and bringing exploiters to justice – and bringing [some] justice to those who have been exploited (Schwab, 2005). As Schwab argues: only by examining both ends of the sex industry's economic spectrum can a successful approach toward ceasing sexual exploitation be obtained (2005, p. 345). This argument chimes with the findings of this

study suggesting the need for a multi-dimensional policy approach to address child prostitution.

Despite Malawi being a signatory to the UNCRC and its *Optional Protocol on Child Prostitution* as well as being a signatory to the *Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, and participating in global meetings addressing ways of ending child prostitution, the phenomenon remains obfuscated in terms of policy focus. National measures designed to provide a more protective environment for children include legal provisions requiring the registration of births and protection of inheritance rights as well as the employment of community child protection workers at district level. And the development of a child protection system is cast as a priority in the Malawi growth and development strategy (UNICEF, 2011; Malawi Government, Ministry of Finance, 2012). The *2010 Child Care, Protection and Justice Act* (Malawi Government, 2010) refers to the protection of children from neglect, discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation, oppression and exposure to physical, mental, social and moral hazards; placing responsibility for protection with parents or guardians.

It is notable that neither the international child protection literature (UNICEF, 2016) nor national child protection legislation refers explicitly to the phenomenon of prostitution, referring instead to sexual exploitation. The continued emphasis on moral hazard serves to avoid explicit engagement with child prostitution as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires attention to structural as well as individual factors.

Exploration of the demand side of prostitution<sup>31</sup> in this study arose when participants were discussing the ways in which they were treated by clients. And referring to me as an ally, told me that, as a man, I was in a better position to explain why male clients: i) showed a preference for younger girls, and ii) were sometimes violent towards them. I am not in a position to make specific policy recommendations in relation to the demand side of prostitution on the basis of this study but include participants' own questions as recommendations for future research.

#### **7.4.2 Policy Recommendation 2**

In developing multi-dimensional policy that focusses specifically on child prostitution, policy-makers would benefit from the use of the Capability Approach, drawing attention to structural factors as well as individual behaviour and experiences, and linking child prostitution to questions of national development and social justice.

Such a paradigm shift could be instrumental in identifying 'freedoms' and 'unfreedoms' – the obligation to do something one would not choose to do, if there were any plausible alternative - (Sen, 2005, p. 153) and conceptualising children's paths into, and continued involvement in, prostitution as a set of choices constrained by circumstances and structural factors beyond their control. Furthermore, it would be possible to identify interventions that are more and less likely to be effective in supporting children to avoid or end their dependence on prostitution as a means of survival. In this study, some participants described their involvement in prostitution as "indefinite", describing themselves as *chiwanda cha uhule* (possessed by prostitution), *za kumtundu* (resigned (to prostitution)) or saying: *Bureni: hule amasiya* (why would I quit?). In the light of global evidence that a significant proportion of

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<sup>31</sup> Those buying sex

women involved in the sex industry first became involved as children (Coy, 2016) the development of policies to prevent or reduce the engagement of children in prostitution is particularly important. By paying attention to structural factors that diminish the freedoms and choices of children and young women in Malawi (including patriarchal society that lends support to the continuation of early marriage and childbirth, acceptance of girls' limited engagement in formal education), sharper focus would be cast not only on the discriminatory experiences of girls and young women but also on national threats to development.

### **7.4.3 Policy Recommendation 3**

In seeking to support development in the global south, greater awareness is required by government and non-governmental actors from the global north of deeply embedded cultural structures and practices that may render northern solutions to national problems ineffective. In the context of this thesis, this recommendation is directed to northern agencies that intervene, or fund national organisations to intervene, in the precarious circumstances of children's lives, and focuses on the importance of developing deeper understandings not only of the economic but also the cultural contexts in which their interventions are directed, and deeper understandings of the phenomena they seek to influence. There are numerous examples of international interventions to relieve poverty, improve health, promote participation in schools, respond to the plight of orphaned children, working children, children engaged in prostitution and so on. And there are also numerous example of how such interventions have failed to achieve their goals in effecting social change (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003; Charnley, 2007; Hahn and Holzscheiter, 2013; Rasmussen, 2016). Broader analyses of such failures point to the need, on the part of those seeking to effect change, for a critical consciousness of power, without which 'no theory of social change can inform the practical challenges of bringing about social change' (Pearce, 2010, p. 632). This requires an

understanding that social change is complex, embedded in power relationships and structures, requires close connections with the grass roots and critical reflexivity of organisational values and the congruence between values and practices.

#### **7.4.4 Policy Recommendation 4**

Within a broader context of international aid to support the development of education in the global south, Malawi implemented a policy of free primary education from the mid-1990s. This study has illustrated barriers to effective implementation that must be considered if this policy is to achieve its intended purposes. While the introduction of the policy in 1994 saw an increase in enrolment, its impact in terms of poverty reduction has been limited (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003) and the policy itself has been described as ‘successful failure’ in the context of a neoliberal state (Kendall, 2004, 2007). As Kadzamira and Rose (2003) have argued, while widening access to primary education is widely considered ‘pro-poor’, it does not guarantee reach to the poorest and does not prevent early drop-out particularly among girls. They also point to negative implications of rapid widening of access in terms of: i) quality of education (larger class sizes and insufficient supply of qualified teachers); ii) relevance (classes with wide age-ranges, tensions between vernacular and international language of delivery, tension between academic and vocational curricula, qualification inflation leading to a need for increase in availability of secondary education); and iii) ‘fit’ with cultural expectations for children, particularly girls, in terms of work related roles within the family.

The stories of participants in this study, more than a decade later, serve as a reminder of how children, particularly girls, from the poorest families, continue to be excluded from educational opportunities. Lack of means for meeting basic needs including food and clothes, as well as additional costs associated with schooling, can all too easily lead them to quit

school and enter marriage at an early age or consider prostitution as a way of funding their education. But, as this study shows, prostitution itself does not offer a viable means of funding girls' education to complete primary school or enrol in secondary school.

Recommendations arising from these findings, which confirm existing evidence of the inefficacy of existing policies, are cast in terms of: i) the need for greater understanding of the benefits of primary and secondary education for girls, ii) the need to remove institutional barriers to education, and iii) the concurrent need to increase household incomes, thereby enabling enrolment in primary school and progression to secondary school (McConnell and Mupuwaliywa, 2016; Özler, 2016). They are also cast in terms of critical perspectives on the paradigms that underpin contemporary mechanisms for policy development: i) through international aid that reflect the power of institutions in the global north (Maclure, 2006), and ii) through the overwhelming predominance of quantitative methods to measure inputs, outputs and outcomes, over the use of ethnographic methods to inform deeper understandings of policy failure and design of more realistic policy planning (Vavrus, 2005).

#### **7.4.4.1 Making education accessible to all**

This recommendation requires a number of steps.

- **Influencing public understanding of the benefits of education**

First, is a call to influence public understanding of the benefits of education that is accessible to all, where 'all' draws attention to the long-term benefits of girls' education and the long-term benefits of education for girls and boys from the poorest families. While 'free' primary education has improved enrolment rates it has not offered a panacea for the reasons explained above. The resulting shift of the major access barrier from primary to secondary school

enrolment underlines the need to extend freely accessible education to the secondary and tertiary sectors.

- **Enabling access to education**

This recommendation draws on evidence of interventions that can influence family thinking about the costs and benefits of enrolling their children, particularly girls, in school and supporting their continued enrolment through primary and secondary school. Evaluation of a randomized control trial to test the benefits of a cash transfer programme, including tuition support and monthly cash stipends to support girls' education (Kim, 2016), has demonstrated some success of such a programme as measured by improved school attendance and better test scores, at least in the short run, and higher educational aspirations.

While government financing of such a scheme would currently rely on external financing through international aid or loans, there is potential for the introduction of a revolving fund to create a supportive environment for village savings and loans that offer relief for families at community level. Policy development in this arena also needs to embrace the most appropriate means of including those most likely to be excluded: those in the poorest communities vulnerable to income threatening shocks and hazards, i.e., subsistence farmers and families without employment in urban areas, as well as families without adult support such as child headed households, lone parent families and families who have assumed responsibility for the care of children from the extended family and beyond.

#### **7.4.5 Policy Recommendation 5**

Lastly, efforts to bring about a paradigm shift in how women and girls are perceived must be expounded as families in most communities still attach greater value to the education of boys

than girls, thereby limiting girls' freedom to determine what they want to be and what they want to do, in other words, to determine their own capability sets and live lives they have reason to value.

It has been well-established that deeply entrenched and interlocking structural factors that perpetuate women's disadvantage have contributed to the failure of the MDGs to achieve gender equality, women's empowerment and to address poverty particularly among children and women. Fredman, Kuosmanen and Campbell, (2016) explain:

The experience of the MDGs demonstrates that the meaningful advancement of gender equality lies not only in the choice of targets but in the way in which those targets are planned, implemented, and delivered. All policies undertaken to reach the post-2015 benchmarks for gender equality need to be evaluated on the basis of the existing human rights paradigm (p181).

Referring to Target 4.1—ensuring all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes—they go on to present a four-dimensional model of transformative equality that captures women's multi-dimensional disadvantage and offers a route to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5). They reiterate the need for: i) free access to education with no indirect costs, ii) higher quality education in terms of trained staff, iii) improved facilities such as gender specific toilets to avoid deterring girls' attendance following puberty, iv) support for young mothers to complete their education. And they argue the importance of unconditional cash transfers in order to avoid excluding those who face the highest barriers. The importance of unconditionality is linked to Fredman's (2016) argument that "given the



appropriate capability set (such as good quality schools situated nearby)” there would be no need for conditions. In sum, they stress the need for measures to redress stereotyping, stigma, humiliation, and violence and to promote the dignity and worth of girls and women.

Further insights can also be gleaned from recent research into children’s mobilities. This has demonstrated the implications of gender inequalities in mobility, for example through the popular belief in many parts of the world, including Malawi, that girls’ access to bicycles is equated with higher risks of inappropriate behaviour and exposure to sexual abuse (Porter *et al.*, 2017).

My study has also illustrated how inattention to interlocking structural factors continues to perpetuate and deepen inequalities and limits opportunities and capabilities for girls and women to lead lives they value similar to what MacPherson *et al* (2012) recommend for increased efforts on women empowerment as key to addressing structural factors that drive women to consider prostitution. Some decide to engage in prostitution while others settled for marriage (remaining reliant on a man) with the associated potential for abuse. As policy-makers globally consider ways by which the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that have replaced the MDGs can be achieved, it is important that goals related to women and girls’ equality incorporate explicit attention to girls and women who rely on prostitution for their survival.

#### **7.4.6 Policy Recommendation 6**

There is a need for government and non-governmental organisations to devise measures to engage with children and young people involved in prostitution. While most NGOs involved in this area of work are informed by goals of HIV/AIDS prevention or control, children and

young people are largely ignored as beneficiaries of such projects that tend to be targeted at ‘adults’. But as my study demonstrates, the connection between child and adult prostitution is strong. While adults involved in prostitution were able to identify efforts of organisations to support them, they were clear that this was not the case while they were children. As Labani confided in me: *ukuziwa Pearson, ngakhale ife mutown tikumathandizidwa, koma timalephera kuwafikira ana chifuka amati tizingofikira akuluakulu azanthu. Ukafika mumidzinso ndiye umapezamonso ana ambiri koma ndiye utani poti wangouzidwa kuti upereke macondom kwa mahule akuluakulu. Mwakuti iwo samadziwa kuti akachitiridwa nkhanza atha kuwauza abungwe lakutilakuti: (You know Pearson, while we are able to get this support such as condoms, there are children who we see but are just ignored because when we are given condoms to distribute we are told to give to adult sex workers. But there are more children we meet even in rural areas who are in prostitution. They hardly know where to seek support and what kind of support they could seek from some organisations).*

It is precisely this kind of insight into the lives of children involved in prostitution that lends support to the need for ethnographic and participatory research to better inform policy (Vavrus, 2005). And in line with Mclure’s (2006) argument that exogenous “donor-control” research paradigms are too often irrelevant to the African educational policy context and do little to develop local research capacity, I end with a final policy recommendation.

## **7.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

The following recommendations for future research build on the implications of the findings of this study but also include other relevant areas for further research in the area of child prostitution that could not be addressed in this study.

### **7.5.1 Research Recommendation 1: Extending Understandings of Boys' Experiences of Prostitution**

The participants in this research were all girls or young women. This was not by design, but by virtue of the networks used to access young people engaged in prostitution. Participants were, however, aware of young men who were engaged in prostitution. There is a poverty of knowledge about why and how boys become involved in, and how they experience, prostitution in a country in which homosexuality is illegal. It is important that the well-being of boys is not ignored simply because society as a whole is dominated by male power and authority. Indeed, it is likely that boys involved in prostitution may experience distinct pressures from those of girls. A particular area of concern relates to sex tourism, involving both girls and boys, in Malawi. Recent government interventions linked to the growth of sex tourism include the introduction of community victim-support units (CSVUs) (Bwalo Lothandiza Ochitiridwa Nkhanza) in 300 traditional authorities, Police Victim Support Units (PVSU) (Ofesi ya Chitetezo ndi Chinsinsi ku Polisi), a Child Help line (Titandizane) and a programme of One Stop Centres (Chikwanekwane). These offer opportunities for evaluative research.

### **7.5.2 Research Recommendation 2: Extending the Use of the Capability Approach as a Framework for Research Concerned with Child Prostitution**

The Capability Approach has enriched the findings of this study by facilitating understanding of the ways in which structural factors constrain the choices made by girls and young women engaging in prostitution, so that the agency they exercise is 'ambiguous'. I, therefore, recommend its use in research concerned with child prostitution in other settings. This would facilitate the production of knowledge in diverse settings, and comparative analysis, to inform

the development of global policy on child prostitution as a matter of national and international development.

### **7.5.3 Research Recommendation 3: Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (Marriage Act) 2015**

The introduction of the Marriage Act (Malawi Government, 2015b) is intended to protect girls from early marriage (under 18 years of age) by reducing early pregnancy and school drop-out among girls. These factors, together with experiences of violence in marriage, are also associated with engagement in prostitution. It will, therefore, be important to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this legislation in a context in which traditional beliefs and traditional authority remain strong and resistance to the authority of the state is well-documented (Swainson, 2000).

### **7.5.4 Research Recommendation 4: Paying Attention to the Demand for Prostitution**

Research exploring different aspects of prostitution has typically focussed on what might be termed ‘the supply side’, on those who provide sexual services. But as Coy (2016, p. 16) has argued recently in the context of the global north: Men who abuse and exploit girls and women by paying for access to their bodies have become invisible, as have the ways in which their behaviours are linked to deeply entrenched and naturalised gender norms. In a society, such as Malawi, where gender norms produce even greater disparities of power between men and women, influencing change may reasonably be expected to be an even bigger challenge. Yet, without challenging hegemonic power structures which so clearly serve to disadvantage girls and women, and to commodify their bodies (Nussbaum, 2005; Coy, 2016) the chances of addressing child prostitution remain slim.

### **7.5.5 Research Recommendation 5: Need for a longitudinal study on prostitution**

I recommend a **longitudinal** study to illuminate the trajectories of individuals who become involved in prostitution as children, and the long-term effects of childhood involvement in prostitution. My study shows how constrained capabilities during childhood, that led to involvement in prostitution, continued to affect the exercise of individual agency in early adulthood as young women were striving to lead lives they valued. While the connection between agency in childhood and adulthood, the result of structural inequalities, has been acknowledged by some scholars (Dodsworth, 2015; Coy, 2016), my study highlights young participants' sense of 'inability' to quit prostitution, viewing it as their only means of survival.

The majority of participants in my study first became involved in prostitution as children (see Table 4, Chapter 5). They insisted that no one quits; that they were 'possessed' by prostitution (*chiwanda cha uhule*) and that there was no real way out for them other than reliance on a man to provide for their livelihood. This suggests the likelihood of a strong relationship between child and adult prostitution, and demands a more nuanced understanding of the processes by which social practices are reproduced as a result of the interplay between social structures and individual (Frohlich and Potvin, 2010; Abel and Frohlich, 2012), or group (Stewart, 2005; Ibrahim, 2006) agency. More clearly developed understanding of these social practices, I argue, would serve better to inform effective policy and practice interventions within diverse cultural contexts to ensure that continued involvement in prostitution is not the result of being 'possessed' by prostitution (*chiwanda cha uhule*).

### **7.5.6 Research Recommendation 6**

Funding and continuing development of research by and for research participants, supported by research facilitators familiar with the socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts in which research is being conducted. This familiarity with the research environment must be complemented by knowledge and skills of a wide repertoire of research techniques and the capacity to develop new techniques to maximize the relevance and utility of research findings for intended beneficiaries.

## **7.6 Final Reflections**

In undertaking this study, I have faced looks of incredulity and reactions indicating deep discomfort at the idea of researching child prostitution. As Jupp-Kina (2010) argues, research is not a neutral activity. Despite starting the research with an awareness of poverty, family disruption and early marriage as factors that can coalesce to encourage girls and young women to engage in prostitution, the stories that participants shared with me have led me to re-question the privileges I enjoy as a man, and to strengthen my commitment to social and political activism. As a citizen of a country with a constitution based on democracy and human rights, my understanding of the importance of this study has grown during the research process. I realised that the effective denial of a social problem fuelled by the discriminatory impact of structural inequalities and social problems on girls and young women was linked to unwillingness, particularly among men, to engage with the notion of prostitution as a problem.

As Dominelli wrote nearly twenty years ago:

feminism's determination to improve the quality of life for women has an uncomfortable message for men who desire to hang on to gender-based privileges: men who benefit from these will have to give them up. For, without their doing so, gender

equality cannot be achieved. The one option feminism does not leave men is that of “no change” (Dominelli, 1999, pp. 19–20).

In the role of an ally, I plan to utilise my position as a man with the power to work with children and young women in creating a platform where they can share their own stories and experiences of prostitution and join other young women in challenging cultural and structural inequalities. I believe, as argued by Leichtentritt and Arad (2005, p. 483), it is by offering a platform for marginalized groups such as children and young people involved in prostitution that it may be possible to develop meaningful responses and ways to address child prostitution. Participants expressed interest in being involved in the dissemination of the findings of the research and engagement with policy-makers in challenging these inequalities and in ensuring that their plight and voices for social change and justice remain dominant. This highlights the principles and strengths of participatory (action) research (Baum, MacDougall and Smith, 2006; Kesby, Kindon and Pain, 2007; Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007).

Experiences of prostitution left participants in this study with what they described as ‘horrific’ memories. The idea that this was too difficult for others, not engaged in prostitution, to hear was something I found difficult to comprehend. This gave me strength to convey participants’ own stories and encouragement to challenge cultural practices that are retained at the cost of social justice for girls and young women like those who participated in this research. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche (2012, YouTube) has argued: “Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture”. Practices that are uncomfortable for us to hear about should encourage us to challenge culturally driven structural inequalities that limit

‘freedoms’. Every time I struggled while analysing the data and re-hearing some of the stories captured in this study, I found encouragement in Adiche’s talk because it challenges us to think actively of gendered structural and cultural inequalities. If, as I found in my study, these continue to be ignored by policy-makers, Malawi’s commitment to prevent children and young people’s involvement in prostitution could be in vain.





## **APPENDIX 1: LITERATURE REVIEW ON CHILD PROSTITUTION**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Methods (for studies)</b>
Abdella <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (SSA); State University New York (US).	Children's rights	<i>Open &amp; close ended interviews</i> with 70 (ages: 10-16) <i>street children</i> who were orphans & migrants sampled from a local NGO.
Andrews (2004)	US; North western University	Children's right (Trafficking; sex tourism & paedophile)	Discussion/Advocacy
Barnardo's (2009)	UK	Children's rights approach (grooming, controlled & targeted)	Draws on cases from 4 young people who had been involved while aged between 11 and 14 years but had been rescued from prostitution (by law enforcement agencies but working with

Barnardo's which has been described as UK's largest childcare charity (Curtis *et al.*, 2004).

Chase & Statham (2005)	UK	The children's rights approach	Literature review
Cusick (2002)	Imperial College (UK)	Children's rights approach	Review of policy documents and scholarly articles
Ecpat International	Thailand (2011) Sweden (2008); Cambodia (2006b); Bangladesh (2006a)	Children's rights approach	These are a series of reviews by Ecpat International conducted in different countries.
Ennew (2008)	ECPAT International	Structure and agency	Thematic review of the literature
Ferranti (2007)	US Department of Justice	Children's rights	

Leichtentritt & Arad (2005)	Israel (Middle East), Tel Aviv University.	Structure & Agency	<i>Narrative interviews</i> with 9 <i>street boys</i> purposively sampled.  Employs thematic analysis.
Hwang and Bedford (S. L. Hwang and Bedford, 2003)	Taiwan (& US) University & National Taiwan University (Taiwan)		Mixed method: i) Analysis of case files of 1448 girls arrested for prostitution; ii) interviews with 49 girls arrested for prostitution.  <i>41 of these girls were interviewed between 1990 and 1992.</i>
Lukman (Lukman, 2006, 2009a; 2011).  Lung <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan)  Taiwan	Children's rights approach	Interviews and questionnaires 86 girls rescued from prostitution   Survey questionnaire : 158 children involved in prostitution and 65 high school girls not involved in prostitution to act as a control group.

Melrose (2010)	Bedfordshire University	Structure and agency & key features of the children rights approach are visible	
Mitchell <i>et al.</i> (2010)	US (University of New Hampshire)		Survey Questionnaire and interviews with key criminal justice informants
Montgomery (2015)	Baan Nua, Thailand (East Asia); The Open University, UK	Structural discourse	Ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1993 & 1994 involving participant  Observation of 65 boys and girls (aged between 6 & 14 years)
Nadon, 1998	Canada (N. America); University of Manitoba)		82 adolescents were selected for interviews (45 child prostitutes and 37 children not involved in prostitution)
O'Grady (1992)	Thailand (Ecpat International)	Children's rights approach (that	Participant's observation

		centres on a sex tourism discourse)	
Pedersen & Hegna (2003)	Oslo, Norway  (Europe); University of Oslo;		Survey Questionnaire with  10,828 aged 14-17 years. 50.8% boys & 49.1% girls, recruited from the 8th, 9th and 10th grades in the Norwegian school system in 1996
Pearce (2011)	Bedfordshire  University (UK)	A children's rights approach	
Phoenix (2001)	UK	Structure and agency	Semi-structured interviews and builds on a study conducted in 1994 (Phoenix, 1997).
Rand (2010)	US	The children's rights approach	

Rafferty (2008)	Pace University, US	The children's rights approach with a human trafficking discourse of underpinning prostitution
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**APPENDIX 2(A): DURHAM UNIVERSITY ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM****RESEARCH ETHICS AND RISK ASSESSMENT FORM**

All research that involves access to human participants or to personal data with identifiable cases must be assessed for ethical issues and risks to the research participants and researcher(s)<sup>32</sup>. The research ethics form starts this process and must be submitted by the principal investigator for *all* such projects that staff or students of the School intend to undertake. Students and PGRs completing the process should seek guidance and support from supervisors. Staff members are invited to seek advice and support from the co-chairs of the SASS ethics sub-committee. Research that is purely literature-based does not require ethical approval.

Applications for ethical approval are reviewed in line with relevant codes of ethical practice, such as that of the British Sociological Association<sup>33</sup> or ESRC Research Ethics Framework<sup>34</sup>. Data should also be handled in a manner compliant with the Data Protection Act<sup>35</sup>. Researchers seeking funding from a research council must work within the appropriate research ethics framework.

***When completed, this form should be submitted to the designated approver for your type of project. The form must be approved before any data collection begins.***

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.dur.ac.uk/research.office/local/research\\_governance/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/research.office/local/research_governance/)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/research-ethics.aspx>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.dur.ac.uk/research.office/local/research\\_governance/data\\_protection/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/research.office/local/research_governance/data_protection/)



<b><i>Type of project</i></b>	<b><i>Default Approver</i></b>
Students undertaking dissertations on taught courses (including MSW students)	Your dissertation supervisor
All other students undertaking project work as part of taught modules	Your module convenor or workshop leader
Research students	Director of Postgraduate Research (via SASS Research Secretary (PGR))
Staff	Chair of Ethics Sub-Committee (via SASS Research Administrator)

**PART A. To be filled in by all applicants**

**Section A. I Project outline**

Name of investigator: Pearson Nkhoma

E-mail address: pearson.nkhoma@durham.ac.uk

Dissertation/project title: Understanding Child Prostitution in Malawi

Degree and year (students only): PhD 1<sup>st</sup> year

Student ID (students only): 000221239

Project funder (where appropriate): Durham University's Doctoral Studentship

Estimated start date: 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2013 Estimated end date: 28<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2014

of project of project

Summary (up to 250 words describing main research questions, methods and brief details of any participants)

*Dissertation/project title: Understanding Child Prostitution in Malawi*

*Main research aims/questions*

- How do children and young people in Malawi make sense of their experiences of prostitution? What perspectives do children and young people in Malawi provide about their

experiences of prostitution? How do children and young people in Malawi construct and interpret their experiences of prostitution?

- In what contexts do the socioeconomic and political structural issues shape children and young people's experiences of prostitution, including their routes into, involvement in and exit from, prostitution)?(In what contexts do children and young people's experiences of prostitution come to being?
- How do children and young people in Malawi exercise agency in relation to their routes into, involvement in and exit from, prostitution in context of the social, economic, ideological and political conditions?

### *Proposed methods*

I am collaborating with [NAME OF NGO]<sup>36</sup> to foreground young people's experiences and accounts (constructions and interpretations) of their experiences of prostitution in Malawi. I will employ the following data collection methods embedded within a participatory research framework:

- Participant observation of children and young people who have experiences of prostitution who are being supported by [NAME OF NGO]. Participant observation will be carried out within [NAME OF NGO] premises where the children and young people access support.
- Narrative interviews with young people who have experiences of prostitution.
- Semi-structured interviews with [NAME OF NGO] officials who directly work and engage with children and young people who will participate in the study.
- Visual and participatory methods with young people participating in the study. Specific methods will be discussed with and chosen by participants. Possibilities include: role

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<sup>36</sup> ([NAME OF NGO]) is a local NGO which was established in 1997 "to respond to the needs and challenges affecting children and young people in Malawi". [NAME OF NGO] works in different locations in Malawi.

playing, (character) mapping, photovoice, storyboarding and problem tree. The attached sheet offers a synopsis of the methods.

### *Sample/participants*

- Children and young aged between 14 and 18 years old with experiences of prostitution who are being supported by [NAME OF NGO].
- [Name of NGO] Officials directly working with these children and young people.

### **Section A.2 Ethics checklist** (please answer each question by ticking as appropriate)

	Yes	No
a). Does the study involve participants who are <i>potentially</i> vulnerable for example, children and young people; those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment; those unable to give informed consent or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b). Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent (e.g. covert observation of people in <i>non-public</i> places)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c). Could the study cause harm, discomfort, stress, anxiety or any other negative consequence beyond the risks encountered in normal life? Does the research address a sensitive topic? <sup>37</sup>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d). Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e). Will the project involve the participation of patients, users or staff through the NHS or a social services department?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<sup>37</sup> Sensitive topics can include participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their gender or ethnic status. Elite Interviews may also fall into this category.

f). Will you be required to undertake a Criminal Records Bureau check to undertake the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
g). Are appropriate steps being taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality? (in accordance with an appropriate Statement of Ethical Practice).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of questions a) to f) or ‘no’ to question g), you must complete Part B of the form. Now go to Section A.3.

### Section A.3 Risk assessment checklist

	Yes	No
a). Does the study involve practical work such as interviewing that requires the researcher(s) to travel to and from locations outside the University?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b). Does the study involve accessing non-public sites that require permission to enter?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c). Are there any identifiable hazards involved in carrying out the study, such as lone working in isolated settings?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of questions a) to c), you must complete Part C. of this form.

### Section A.4 Next steps

- a) If *only* Part A is required, please go to Part D of the form and ensure you complete the checklist and sign the completed form. Submit the form to the designated approver

- b) If you need to fill in Part B (this is required if you have answered ‘yes’ to any of questions a) to e) in Section A.2) please continue and complete Part B and add any further attachments.
  
- c) If you need to fill in Part C (this is required if you have answered ‘yes’ to any of the questions in Section A.3) please continue and complete Part C.

**PART B**

Part B must be completed if you have answered ‘Yes’ to any of questions a to e in Section 2 of Part A.

**Section B.1 Other approvals**

If your project requires approval from an NHS or Social Services ethics committee, you should submit a draft NHS/SS application to your designated approver within SASS, along with this form, prior to submission to the appropriate external ethics committee. If you are submitting a draft NHS/SS to your designated approver within SASS, you only need to complete Section 1 of Part B. Once approval has been granted by SASS, including meeting any conditions, you must submit the approved forms together with evidence of this approval. Researchers undertaking studies in an NHS or social services setting must abide by the *Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care*<sup>38</sup>.

- a) Does the research require ethical approval from the NHS or a Social Services Authority?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If ‘Yes’, please ensure the draft documentation is attached.

- b) Might the proposed research meet the definition of a clinical trial? It may do so if it involves studying the effects on participants of drugs, devices, diets, behavioural strategies such as exercise or counselling, or other ‘clinical’ procedures.

Yes ☐ No ☒

If ‘Yes’, a copy of this form must be sent to the University’s Insurance Officer, Procurement Department. Tel: 0191 334 9266. Insurance approval will be necessary before the project can start and evidence of approval must be attached with this form.

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Aboutus/Researchanddevelopment/AtoZ/Researchgovernance/DH\\_4002112](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Aboutus/Researchanddevelopment/AtoZ/Researchgovernance/DH_4002112)

## Section B.2 Project details and ethical considerations

- a) Who are your research participants? (please describe sample size, characteristics and sampling procedure):

My sample will comprise of 10-20 children and young people aged between 14 and 18 years old with experiences of prostitution who are being supported by [NAME OF NGO]. 14 years is the age when someone becomes a young person in Malawi (Malawi Government, 1996); and the UNRC defines anyone below the age of 18 as a child. These demarcations have helped me to define the group of children and young people to be engaged in the study. Rather than aiming for population representation, engaging a smaller sample of children and young people will help me to achieve greater depth and detailed understanding of their experiences of prostitution to generate a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon (Mason, 2005). The total sample will however depend on the children's willingness to participate in this study among those who are involved in [NAME OF NGO] activities. Through participant observation of the prospective participants in the way they are supported by [NAME OF NGO], I aim to observe, build rapport and engage in conversation with potential participants (Montgomery, 2007). In addition, I will also engage those who work directly with the children and young people participating in the study in semistructured interviews to gain background information about the participants' experiences.

- b) Are there any people who will be excluded? If so state the criteria to be used:

Young people who have no experience of prostitution. And I will discuss with [NAME OF NGO] workers any potential risks which participation in the study may pose to those who have given consent.



- c) Who will explain the investigation to the participant(s)? And how? (attach information sheet or similar)?

I expect [NAME OF NGO] 's social/youth worker directly engaging with the children to introduce me and my role during initial meetings. Upon establishing contact and building rapport I will further explain my role, the roles of the youth worker and the research assistant, answer any questions the young people may have, and continually check the willingness of participants to take part in the study, reminding them of their right to withdraw, and their right to rejoin the study without having to give any explanation.

Having established contact during initial meetings with the prospective participants, I will hand out a leaflet to the participants and also explain in chichewa (Malawi's national language) about the purpose of the research, my role as a researcher and their rights as participants, stressing voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any stage of the research as well as ways to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

- d) How and where will consent be recorded? (attach consent form)

I have attached the form (to be translated from English to Chichewa), where consent will be recorded. Participants will have the choice to give consent verbally (to be recorded), written or by thumb-print.

- e) What steps will be taken to safeguard the anonymity of records, to maintain the levels of confidentiality and security of data storage promised to participants and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act?

I will change the names of the research participants and the research setting. All data (audio, textual, visual) will be stored in a password-protected computer and locked cabinets. As this study was developed to build evidence and collective action in supporting children and young

people who have experiences of prostitution, I will also negotiate with [NAME OF NGO] on whether to change its name and ways to facilitate collaborative dissemination/authorship of articles from the study to ensure that data remains anonymised. The fact that [NAME OF NGO] works in different locations in Malawi may contribute towards maintaining anonymity of the data without changing [NAME OF NGO]'s name. Primary data from the participants will remain anonymised.

- f) Will non-anonymised questionnaires, tapes or video recordings be destroyed at the end of the project?

Yes ☐ Go to B.3      No ☐ Go to next question Not Applicable ☒ Go to B.3

- g) What further use do you intend to make of the material and how and where will this be stored?

- h) Will consent be requested for this future use?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable ☐

### Section B.3 Risk or discomfort to participants<sup>39</sup>

What discomfort, danger or interference with normal activities could be experienced by **participants**?

State probability, seriousness, and precautions to minimise each risk.

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<sup>39</sup>For further guidance applicants can consult *Social Research Update: Safety in Social Research* <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU29.html> and the *Code of Safety* developed by the Social Research Association <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/guidelines.htm#safe>

Risk/Discomfort	Probability (high/medium/low)	Seriousness (high/medium/low)	Precautions
Distressful memories and/or accounts (Melrose, 2000)	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By collaborating with and accessing participants through [NAME OF NGO] pose as an assurance that participants are accessing appropriate courses of psychosocial support to help participants achieve some emotional distance from their experiences, hence, finding it easier to talk about such experiences with me in trust, confidence and confidentiality (Ansell <i>et al.</i>, 2012). I will use visual and participative data collection methods to enhance participation and dialogue of personal experiences without making such account more personal (McHugh and O'Neill, 2013).</li> <li>- In addition to services offered by [NAME OF NGO], I will also provide participants with referral information for counseling services offered by voluntary and statutory sector organisations within proximity of the research setting (Rubenson <i>et al.</i>, 2005).</li> <li>- I will stress participant's voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any stage of the research as well as ways to assure them of measures which I have put in place to sustain their confidentiality and anonymity.</li> <li>- In addition, participants will have the choice of having a friend or guardian close at hand in the same or neighbouring room to help deal with any arising distressful issues</li> </ul>

<p>Fear of stigma and discrimination among participants to take part in the study.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>(Williams, Binagwaho and Betancourt, 2012). I will also have the youth worker the participants are familiar with within a contactable distance to support the participants when involvement leads to distressful moment; but I will negotiate with participants if they may need support from other service providers other than the youth worker to maintain anonymity (Rubenson <i>et al.</i>, 2005).</p> <p>- Data will be anonymised and kept in a password-protected computer; identifiable details like names will be kept separate from the primary database. Identifiable images will be blurred. I will seek informed consent from participants before each data collection activity and regarding the use of the data collected.</p>
<p>Security risks to participants, myself and the research assistant's safety</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>- Data collection activities will be carried out within [NAME OF NGO]'s premises and other familiar settings where the NGO undertakes its activities (Boyden, 2000). In addition to sharing emergency numbers with the research assistant and [NAME OF NGO], I will approve any data collection activity and inform [NAME OF NGO] about</p>

			<p>my own data collection movements. I will accompany and/or remain within contactable distance during any data collection activity being facilitated by the research assistant.</p> <p>- I will also recruit a female research assistant so that data collection activities will be facilitated in pair with her all the time to enhance security support (Rubenson <i>et al.</i>, 2005). This will also ensure that I am not alone with participants of the opposite sex. Availability of the female assistant will also accord participants with the opportunity to discuss issues they are uncomfortable to talk with me on the basis of gender (Kirby, 2000).</p>
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**PART C. FIELDWORK RISK ASSESSMENT AND HEALTH DECLARATION**

All applicants who intend to conduct research with human participants outside the University should complete these forms. For further guidance please consult the University's Health and Safety Manual Section F1 at: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/healthandsafety/manual/f1.pdf>

**Section C.1 Fieldwork Risk Assessment (participants and researcher)**

<b>DEPARTMENT:</b> SASS	<b>LOCATION:</b> Malawi
<b>ACTIVITY:</b> Data collection field work including interviewing	<b>PERSONS AT RISK:</b> Researcher
<b>DURATION OF ACTIVITY:</b> Sep. 2013 – Jan. 2014	
<b>POTENTIAL HAZARDS:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Security risks to participants, myself and the research assistant (Rubenson <i>et al.</i>, 2005)</li> <li>2. Emotional breakdown from traumatic experiences and/or disturbing narrations (Melrose, 2000)</li> <li>3. Differing expectations on the research between [NAME OF NGO], the participants and myself.</li> </ol>	
<b>POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Threat to personal safety of participants, the research assistant and myself (Rubenson <i>et al.</i>, 2005; Boyden, 2000).</li> <li>2. Anxiety and feeling of distress (difficult emotional labour) for participants, research assistants and myself (Rubenson <i>et al.</i>, 2005; Melrose, 2002).</li> <li>3. Conflict of interests between [NAME OF NGO], the participants and myself (Montgomery, 2007)</li> </ol>	

**EXISTING CONTROLS:**

1. I will be collaborating with and accessing participants through ([NAME OF NGO]), a local NGO which was established in 1997 “to respond to the needs and challenges affecting children and young people in Malawi”. Data collection activities will be carried out within [NAME OF NGO]’s premises and other familiar settings where the NGO undertakes its activities. All these will help ease levels of personal security risks to participants, the research assistant and myself (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Boyden, 2000).
2. a). By collaborating with and accessing participants through [NAME OF NGO] pose as an assurance that participants are accessing appropriate courses of psychosocial support to help participants achieve some emotional distance from their experiences, hence, finding it easier to talk about such experiences with me in trust, confidence and confidentiality (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Melrose, 2002).
  - b). I will use visual and participative data collection methods to help participants feel comfortable to discuss their personal experiences (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Boyden and Ennew, 1997).
  - c). I will stress the participant’s voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any stage of the research as well as ways to assure them of measures which I am taking to ensure confidentiality and their anonymity (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Bryman, 2012; Montgomery, 2007).
3. a). I will clearly articulate the purposes of my research, methods and my role to any [NAME OF NGO] to anyone engaged in this study (Kirby, 2000).
  - b). Accessing participants through [NAME OF NGO] also assures me that the participants are already in touch with appropriate services and that authorities are aware of most of their risky situation (Ansell *et al.*, 2012).

c). Negotiation with participants' voluntary participation and right to withdraw will be an on-going process (Kendon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). Despite [NAME OF NGO] engaging some young people in community-based advocacy which minimises arising fears of confidentiality, I will throughout my fieldwork stress the participant's voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any stage of the research and assuring them of measures which I am taking to sustain their confidentiality and anonymity (Montgomery, 2007).

d). By collaborating with [NAME OF NGO] also limits the chances of obtaining parental consent especially where some studies suggest that that involvement in prostitution could be as a result of pressures to fulfil parental/guardian filial duties (Williams *et al.*, 2012; Orchard, 2007; Rubenson *et al.*, 2005). I will however negotiate with [NAME OF NGO] if I see the need for parental consent (form attached).

#### **RISK RATING (SEVERITY X LIKELIHOOD) WITH EXISTING CONTROLS**

1. Severity.....2..... X Likelihood.....1..... = Risk Rating.....2....LOW ☒
2. Severity.....3..... X Likelihood....2..... = Risk Rating.....6.....HIGH ☒
3. Severity.....2..... X Likelihood....1..... = Risk Rating.....2.....LOW ☒

#### **NEW CONTROLS REQUIRED:**

1. a). I will recruit a female research assistant to enhance security and emotional support by ensuring that data collection activities are facilitated in pairs (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Melrose, 2002). The female assistant will also accord participants with the opportunity to discuss issues they are uncomfortable to talk with me on the basis of gender (Kirby, 2000).
- b). Presence of the assistant also helps me achieve some ethical and cultural expectations by making sure that I am not alone with participants of the opposite sex (Kirby, 2000).
- c). In addition to sharing emergency alarms with the NGO and my research assistant, I will also inform [NAME OF NGO] about my data collection movements (Montgomery, 2007).



- d). I will also have the youth worker within a contactable distance to enhance security support if a need arises to conduct data collection activities away from [NAME OF NGO]'s premises (Rubenson, *et al.*, 2005)
2. a). By carrying out data collection activities within [NAME OF NGO]'s premises will help to have an agency support workers to provide urgent psychosocial support services to participants when required during the interviewing process (Melrose, 2000)
- b). I will also make arrangements with [NAME OF NGO] to have the youth worker that the children and young people participating in this study are familiar within a contactable distance to support the participants when involvement leads to distressful moment. Any involvement of the worker will however be negotiated with the participant concerned (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005).
- c). Participants will have the right to have a friend or carer close at hand in the same or neighbouring room to help deal with any arising distressful issues (Williams, Binagwaho and Betancourt, 2012).
- d). I will also provide the participants with referral information for counselling services offered by voluntary and statutory sector organisations in proximity of the research setting (Rubenson *et al.*, 2005).
- e). I will also be discussing with my research assistant personal and emotional difficulties arising from data collection activities on a daily basis after each session (Ansell *et al.*, 2012).
3. a). Much as data from this study will remain anonymised, I will be negotiating with the participants, [NAME OF NGO] and my supervisors before embarking on any collaborative dissemination of the findings.
- b). I will from time to time negotiate with the participants and [NAME OF NGO] on emerging risks posed to the participants (Ansell *et al.*, 2012; Kindon, Pain and Kesby,

2007). By collaborating with [NAME OF NGO] also minimises the risk of conflicts arising between my own duties to inform [NAME OF NGO] of risky activities which the participants may be involved is minimised. Nonetheless, when I am certain that the risk to the life or safety of participants is eminent and extreme, I will discuss with the participant[s] concerned and my supervisor before evoking my guarantees of confidentiality (Montgomery, 2007).

**RISK RATING (SEVERITY X LIKELIHOOD) WITH NEW CONTROLS**

1. Severity.....1..... X Likelihood....1..... = Risk Rating.....1.....LOW ☒
2. Severity.....2..... X Likelihood....1..... = Risk Rating.....2.....LOW ☒
3. Severity.....1..... X Likelihood....1..... = Risk Rating.....1.....LOW ☒

**ASSESSOR**

NAME..... JOB TITLE.....

SIGNATURE..... DATE.....

## Section C.2 Fieldwork Health Declaration

During your research you may undertake one or more periods of fieldwork, involving visits to locations some of which will require a reasonable degree of physical health and fitness. In order to ensure that each research project operates with due regard for health and safety - in addition to being rewarding for those involved - all students and staff who expect to participate in fieldwork must declare any medical condition or incapacity which could prevent them from fully participating in the expected activities, or which may endanger the health and safety of themselves and others. As a condition of undertaking the research, you must complete the form below, after first becoming familiar with the details and expectations of the proposed fieldwork activities. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence and used only for determining the suitability of a fieldwork activity.

Please note that answering YES to any of Part B does not automatically exclude you from a fieldwork activity and every effort will be made to provide alternative arrangements where these are necessary, but it is essential that you provide full information. Where YES is answered, or the Part C declaration is not signed, the matter will be referred for a further medical opinion.

### PART A

Department: SASS

Location of research: [District] (Malawi) Start: Sept. 2013 and End: Jan. 2014

Name of researcher: Pearson Nkhoma Name of supervisor: Helen Charnley

## **PART B**

Do you have a medical condition, allergy or intolerance that may restrict your taking part in the expected fieldwork activities? No.

DETAILS \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any physical injury or incapacity that may restrict your taking part in the expected fieldwork activities? No

DETAILS \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take medication to control any of the above conditions? N/A

DETAILS \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART C**

I declare that I am not knowingly suffering from any medical condition or disability that could prevent me from participating fully in the fieldwork activities.

My last tetanus booster was on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2013

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**PART D. CHECKLIST AND SIGNATURES****Section D.1 Checklist of attachments**

*All applicants should tick which parts of the form you have completed and the documents you are attaching with this form:*

1. Part A (all applicants)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Part B (for research with vulnerable people, on sensitive topics, etc)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Part C (for research outside the university)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Completed draft NHS or social services ethics form (students only, if applicable)	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Confirmation of insurance cover (if applicable; see Part B, section B.1.b.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Information sheet for participants (required if consent is to be obtained)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. Consent form for participants (required if consent is to be obtained)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Draft questionnaire (required if you are using a questionnaire)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Draft interview/focus group guide (required if you are using interviews/focus groups)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Written confirmation from all agencies involved in the study that:  a. they agree to participate;  b. a CRB check is or is not required.  (STUDENTS ONLY ARE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT THIS - the agreement to participate may be 'in principle', pending ethics approval by the university or the agency. An e-mail from a manager or other appropriate gatekeeper is acceptable).	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Section D.2 Signatures**

*All applicants must complete this section*

**Principal Investigator<sup>40</sup>**

Name: .....Date:.....

**Supervisor/tutor (research students only):**

I have read this form and am happy for it to be considered for ethical approval

Name of supervisor: .....Date:.....

**Section D.3 Next steps**

This signed form with all attachments should be submitted to the appropriate person for review and approval, as indicated on the front sheet of the form.

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<sup>40</sup> For student dissertations and projects, the principal investigator will usually be the student

**FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

**PART E: OUTCOME OF APPLICATION**

**PLEASE TICK**

a) The proposal is satisfactory and is approved as it stands.	
b) The proposal is accepted subject to approval of an NHS, Social Services or other external Ethics Committee (copy to be submitted to SASS when approved)	
c) The proposal cannot be approved and the applicant should submit a new/revised proposal in the light of the comments noted below.	

Comments (for forwarding to the applicant)

Signed.....Date.....

Name (block capitals) ..... Designation .....

A COPY OF THE APPROVED FORM MUST BE KEPT ON FILE.



STUDENTS ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES AND PGRs MUST SUBMIT A COPY OF THE APPROVED FORM TO THE RELEVANT PROGRAMME SECRETARY.

## APPENDIX 2(B): MALAWI COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### ETHICAL APPROVAL



#### NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Lingadzi House  
Robert Mugabe Crescent  
P/Bag B303  
City Centre  
Lilongwe

Tel: +265 1 771 550  
+265 1 774 189  
+265 1 774 869  
Fax: +265 1772 431  
Email: [directorgeneral@ncst.mw](mailto:directorgeneral@ncst.mw)  
Website: <http://www.ncst.mw>

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All communication should be directed to the Director General

Please Reply to: Ref No. : RTT/2/20

7 October 2013

TO: Pearson Nkhoma, PhD candidate, Durham University

CC: Prof. W. Chirwa, Chairperson: NCRSH

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: UNDERSTANDING CHILD PROTECTION IN MALAWI

I refer to your submitted protocol in which you are requesting the National Committee for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (NCRSH) to grant you ethical approval to conduct a research study titled "**Understanding child protection in Malawi**"; the study being undertaken for academic purpose in partial fulfillment of your doctoral studies.

Having considered all the necessary documentation you submitted, NCRSH has **no objection** in granting you ethical approval to conduct the study. Nonetheless, the NCRSH will be interested in the updates of the research exercise whenever necessary. In case of modifications and amendment to this approved protocol, implementation of such changes should not be effected before NCRSH's approval of the same. With this letter, your protocol is **duly approved**.

For further information do not hesitate to contact our office.

Andrew Mpesi

RESEARCH OFFICER (HEALTH, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES)

For: DIRECTOR GENERAL

*A nation with scientifically and technologically led sustainable growth and development*





**APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH BOOKLET (PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND  
CONSENT FORM)**

**Appendix 3**

**Appendix 3A) Information and Consent Leaflet – Children and Young People (English  
Version)**

Children and Young People’s knowledge about Prostitution in Malawi

Hi,

My name is Pearson Nkhoma. I am a Malawian currently studying at a university in the UK.

In my study, I am particularly interested in learning about children and young people's knowledge about Prostitution. I am intent that my study will contribute towards building better knowledge and evidence on how children and young can be supported here in Malawi.

It is, therefore, important that I directly engage with children and young people like yourself.

I will be working with [NAME OF NGO]. But I would like to hear and learn about your views, ideas, knowledge and thoughts of children and young people about this topic.

**Would you like to participate?**

- I will be staying here in [District] for the few months if you are interested in sharing with me your views, ideas, knowledge and thoughts.
- But there is no problem if you aren't interested in participating in this study. You will continue working with [NAME OF NGO] as usual.
- But if you are interested, that's great! However, you may wish to talk about your decision with someone you trust, like a friend or your family member.
- But if you do want to be involved, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time you want to. Just because you have agreed to participate now does not mean that you will have to participate in the project until the end.
- If you withdraw at any stage but then change your mind and would want to be involved again in this study, I will be more than happy to engage with you once again.

- If you ever feel uncomfortable during the course of discussions and do not want to continue with your participation for any reason, that's no problem. You have the right to stop the discussions without necessarily giving any reason. You won't have to do anything that you feel uncomfortable with.
- I will have (name of the research assistant) at times with me. She is working with me in this study. You have the right to decide whether to talk with her, ([NAME OF NGO] Officer working with children and young people with experiences of prostitution) or myself. When you talk with either of us, the other person will still be within contactable distance but will not hear anything you will say (but (may) have access to what you say later on).
- You also have a right to invite anyone else, such as your friend or family member, to be with you during our discussions.
- We will always keep any recorded information and notes made in the course of our discussions and interactions in a locked place or computer protected with a password. (I will not show them to anybody else without seeking your permission).
- At time, my colleague and I may take some notes and record some of our discussions and activities. We will, before doing this, let you know. If you don't want to be recorded, then that's no problem.
- If we ever write or record the activities or discussions which we will undertake together with you, we will always change your name so that no one else will know what it is you said when you talked to me.
- [NAME OF NGO] and my teachers may have access to what you and I (or my colleagues) may have discussed. But they will not have access to your name. This will ensure that no one ever knows what it is you have personally said with me.

- I will not talk to anyone else about what you say to me, unless you tell me that you or someone else is in danger (or when I think that you or someone else) could be at risk. But I will discuss with you first and the people at [NAME OF NGO] about what could be done to help before talking to anyone else.
- I will share the findings in my final report of this study with [NAME OF NGO] and anyone who may have participated in the study including you, individually or within a group. Together, and with the support of [NAME OF NGO], we will agree on whether and/or how to act on the findings.
- I will not include your name in this report to ensure that you are not identified for any of your thoughts, ideas or suggestions.
- I will make sure you have access to counseling and any psychological support if involvement in this study makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Remember, you will continue working with [NAME OF NGO] as usual even when you decide to withdraw your participation in this study or regardless of any information you will share with me and my colleague on this study.

### **Do you have any question?**

Please feel free to contact ([NAME OF NGO] Officer), (Research Assistant) or myself if you want to participate, suggest something or have anything that needs clarification to help you make a decision in relation to this study.

(The research assistant) and I will be at ([NAME OF NGO]/Community Centre where the children and young people meet) to share with you more about this work. If you can't come then, you could tell ([NAME OF NGO] Officer working with children and young people with



experiences of prostitution) that you want to talk to me and I will come and speak to you at a time convenient with you.

Thank you for your time. I hope to talk to you soon!

Pearson Nkhoma

## Child/Young People's Agreement Form

To let me know that you have agreed to participate in the study, please answer each question with a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

1. I have read the leaflet about this study. I understand what it is about .....
2. I asked for clarification on anything I did not understand about the study.....
3. I understand that I have the right not to take part in this study.....
4. I am aware that my participation in this study is on voluntary basis and that I can withdrawal at any time I want.....
5. I understand that what I say or the work that I will do as part of this study may be recorded.....
6. I am also aware that Pearson may use information from this study (as a result of my participation) after this study.
7. I am also aware that my name or contact details will not be used in any of the reports from this study.

Your Name: .....

Date: .....

**Appendix 3B) Information and Consent Leaflet – Parents and Guardians (English Version)**

Children and Young People's knowledge about Prostitution in Malawi

Hi,

My name is Pearson Nkhoma. I am a Malawian currently studying at a university in the UK. In my study, I am particularly interested in learning about children and young people's knowledge about Prostitution. I am particularly interested in the ideas, the thoughts and insights which children and young people may give regarding their lives and experiences in the projects. I am intent that my study will contribute towards building better knowledge and evidence on how children and young can be supported here in Malawi.

It is, therefore, important that I directly engage with children and young people. Much as I will be working with [NAME OF NGO], I am more interested in the ideas, views knowledge and thoughts which children and young people give.

I am aware that your son/daughter attends some of the projects which [NAME OF NGO] carries. S/he has told me that s/he would like to be involved in this research. But I also need your permission to work with your son/daughter. I have included some information about this study, including the rules and guidelines which I will follow at all times throughout my study. I hope the information may help you reach an informed decision.

**Your rights and your son/daughter's rights in this study:**

- It is your choice and your son/daughter's choice whether to take part in this research.
- No one will be implicated because of the discussions I will have you're your son/daughter.

- If both you and your son/daughter agree to take part then, you are both free to withdraw this agreement at any time during the research.
- If either you or your son/daughter ever feel uncomfortable about the research, or you do not want your child to continue with her participation in any of the activities related to this study for any reason then that is fine. Your son/daughter will not be required to take part in anything that s/he or you feel uncomfortable with. However, she/he will continue working with [NAME OF NGO] as usual despite withdrawing from this study.
- I will take keep notes about the work that I do within the research, but I will always keep them in a locked place to secure the information from anyone.
- I will also change the name of your son/daughter to ensure that any information she/he gives and discussion I have with her/him remains anonymous.
- I will not talk to anyone else about what your son/daughter has said to me, unless they tell me that either they or someone else is in danger or might be harmed. If this happens, I will talk to your son/daughter about what could be done to help before I tell anyone else.

### **Do you have any questions?**

On (date), I will be at ([NAME OF NGO]/Community Centre where the children and young people meet). I will be more than happy to answer any question which you may have and share with you any other information which you may need regarding this study.

But if you are unable to come on this day, yet you would like to hear more about this research, then you leave a message at ([NAME OF NGO] Offices). I am very happy to

contact you so that we could discuss your questions or concerns at a time which is convenient to you.

Thank you in advance for your time and support.

Yours faithfully,

Pearson Nkhoma.

## Parental Agreement Form

This form shows that you have given permission for your son/daughter to take part in this research. Please mark in ONE of the boxes for EACH question to let me know that you understand the following sentences:

1. I have read the leaflet about this study. I understand what it is  
about .....
2. I asked for clarification on anything I did not understand about the  
study.....
3. I understand that my son/daughter and I have the right not to take part in this  
study.....
4. I am aware that my son/daughter's participation in this study is on voluntary basis and  
that I can withdraw my permission for her/his participation at any  
time .....
5. I am also aware that Pearson may use the information provided by son/daughter after  
the completion of this study.
6. I am also aware that he will not use my son/daughter's name or contact details in any  
of the reports resulting from this study.



Your Name: .....

Date: .....

## **Appendix 3C) Information and Consent Booklets – Staff (English Version)**

Research Project: Understanding the lived realities of Children and Young People with Experiences (and Knowledge) of Prostitution in Malawi.

### **Introduction**

My name is Pearson Nkhoma. I am a Malawian currently studying at Durham University in the UK. I am currently doing a research aimed at understanding the lived realities of children and young people with experiences of prostitution as part of my study. In this study, I am particularly interested in the ideas, the thoughts and insights which children and young people may give regarding their lives and experiences which include their involvement in the projects.

I have been granted permission from [NAME OF NGO]'s Executive Director to work the children and young people with experiences in prostitution and the staffs who work with such children. In this leaflet, I will briefly outline some of the information about my study, the approaches and activities I hope to carry throughout my time here.

### **Background to the research problem**

As you may be aware, there have been reports in the media and some studies (Muthari...) of increased involvement of children and young people in prostitution in the country's cities, urban centres and tourist areas. This has been a concern of the policy-makers and charities working

with children such as [NAME OF NGO]. However, not much is known about child prostitution. No significant study has been conducted in Malawi which attempts to documents, describe, examine and analyse the lived realities of children and young people who have experiences of prostitution.

## **Research Aim**

In this study, I therefore aim to engage children and young people with experiences of prostitution through participatory and dialogical means to capture their subjective accounts, thoughts and ideas. While looking at the different ways in which children make sense of their experiences, I will analyse their accounts in context of Malawi's social, economic, political and cultural situations. I would like to talk to staff members like yourself to get a clearer understanding of the organisation's approaches...and understanding of child prostitution as a result of your direct engagement with such children and young people. I would like to invite you to participate in this research.

I have also included in this pack an outline detailing the different stages of the research. But before you agree to take part, I would like to highlight the following:

- I will have (name of the research assistant) at times with me. She is working with me in this study. You have the right to decide to talk with her, ([NAME OF NGO] Officer working with children and young people with experiences of prostitution) or myself. When you talk with either of us, the other person will still be within contactable distance but will not hear anything you will say (but (may) have access to what you say later on).

- It is your choice whether and how you would want to participate in this study. You are not obliged to take part. If you decide not to participate, there will be no negative consequences.
- You have the right to withdraw at any time of the study without giving any reason when you change your mind even when you agree to take part in the study now.
- If you ever feel uncomfortable about any part of this research and do not wish to take part in a certain aspect of the research then you are free to withdraw.
- I will record and keep field notes throughout the research but these will always be kept in a secure place. No one else will see them.
- I may present my research in reports, journal articles and presentations after it is completed. All names and identifying characteristics will be changed to maintain anonymity.
- I will not talk to anyone else about what you tell me during the research, unless you disclose information that indicates a serious risk of harm or danger to a child and young person. If this happens, I will talk to you to find out what could be done to help before I discuss this with anyone else.

### **Do you have any questions?**

I am happy to provide some clarifications or more details about this study if.. Please feel free to ask me questions in person when I am at the project, or alternatively you can either call me or email me:

Tel: (Malawi's contact number)

Email: [pearson.nkhoma@durham.ac.uk](mailto:pearson.nkhoma@durham.ac.uk)

Thanking you in advance for your time.

Yours truly,

Pearson Nkhoma

**APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS ABOUT THEIR OWN LIVES AS**  
**CAPTURED BY CHARACTER DRAWINGS AND OTHER VISUAL TOOLS THEY**  
**SKETCHED**

Photo 4:

- Others join prostitution before reaching puberty;
- Attracted by friend's clothes/lifestyles
- Poverty/deprivation/problems

Photo 5

- I started following the death of my father which resulted in limited support considering that my mother was unemployed nor did I have relatives who were working.
- My mother (started) selling second hand clothes but that business did not provide her with enough money to pay for my school and she just stopped supporting me with my education's financial needs. We would spend days without proper meal except for a locally brewed fermented drink.
- Due to inadequate support, I left my mother house. I had met some friends who were in similar situations as I. They suggested prostitution as a means of earning money
- However, that did not yield me enough money. I would meet clients who would not pay me while others who were engaging in prostitution would be abusive towards me.

Photo 6

- You may get sexually transmitted infections
- You have a sickly body
- Having a bad reputation
- Not using condoms
- (Prostitution is) the means of support, albeit not adequate, long term means of earning money
- Establishing frequent relationship with clients you are fond of
- Not knowing how to use safer sex methods such as use of a condom

Photo 7:

- Problems
- Orphanhood/parental deaths

Photo 14:

- I was living in Lilongwe with my grandmother. I was in Standard 3

- I was, at first, living with my mother. She was a single parent having separated with my father.
- I had 7 siblings. Some of my siblings were already engaging in prostitution (before my mother had died). My eldest sister had a child by her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday through prostitution
- My grandmother was very violent towards us when we started living with her, so I run away to live alone. But as I did not have any means of support, I started prostitution. I was about 15 years old then.
- I had wanted to re-enrol back to school. But I had a child then and we all lacked support with no one to help.
- I temporarily quit prostitution after the birth of my second child, married someone
- I have been raped several times and survived an attempt on my life while in prostitution.
- I have been attacked by my clients' wives

#### Photo 19

- It is reflective of how I used to run away from home for prostitution. I was attracted into it by my friends' lifestyle due to their involvement.
- I was fascinated my friends' food and clothes they had through money they earned from prostitution
- My parents had separated
- I quit school while in Form 1 as I had started prostitution; I had multiple partners at school including teachers
- Used to go to Liwonde to stay with my youngest cousin who was also doing prostitution. She had quit school while in Standard 7 for prostitution. Her mother was also in prostitution
- When I earn enough, I use part of the money to support my mother as she is in destitute
- I once found a man I 'married' but he was abusive and was promiscuous, engaging with other sex workers.

#### Photo 22

- Before joining prostitution at about 15 years old, I had wished to be a teacher like my mother
- After joining prostitution, I realised there was no future in it except for survival
- I did picture my future in/through prostitution
- If I can afford to save enough from what I earn, I could build my own house
- Being sexually hurt. But I get encouraged by my colleague who say they had also passed similar experiences, so I don't quit.
- Violent men who hardly pay
- His father died at a very young age; thus, I grew up with a single mother who was unable to support all of us with food and fees for our school.

#### Photo 23

- My job in South Africa was like slavery; with very little pay. I was working every day of the week. Went there in 2012
- My sister died when I was in South Africa. I was unable to come to be her carer when she was in hospital because I did not have money to come here.
- She was 13 years old when her parents died, still in Standard 8.
- Was in a relationship with a young man who was selling charcoal. I wanted to marry him if it were not for my sister who took me to stay with her.
- I am currently the one who supports my mother, who is in her old age
- She lives with her sister who had divorced with her husband.



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